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Sanctae Famulae Dei:
Towards a Reading of Augustine's Female Martyrs

Elena Martin

PhD Thesis
Department of Theology and Religion
Durham University
2009

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ABSTRACT

Augustine of Hippo's depictions of female martyrs have eluded scholarly attention despite recent interest in his attitudes towards women and his involvement with the cult of the martyrs. The present thesis addresses this oversight by resituating Augustine's representations of female martyrs within the corpus of his works. It shows how Augustine's representations of female martyrs are not simple auxiliary illustrations or marginal notes tangential to his main concerns, but rather they are complex images that reveal a depth of thought in their construction and employment, and which, therefore, deserve our attention in their own right. Perceiving the female martyrs within the wider context of his life, his moral and theological writings, and his pastoral ministry, this study explores how Augustine used the female martyrs to contemplate, articulate, and communicate theological beliefs, ecclesiological concerns, eschatological hopes, and moral teachings.

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CONTENTS

<i>Abbreviations</i>	<i>i</i>
----------------------------	----------

INTRODUCTION: <i>Holy Women of God</i>	1
---	----------

PART ONE: ABSTRACTING IMAGES AND BLURRING PORTRAITS

<i>Introduction: Painting Portraits of the Martyrs</i>	<i>12</i>
--	-----------

CHAPTER 1: The Influence of the Audience	16
---	-----------

<i>Martyr Festivals.....</i>	<i>17</i>
<i>Fashioning Popular Portraits.....</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>Adaptation and Modification.....</i>	<i>25</i>
<i>Beyond the Thoughts of the Flesh.....</i>	<i>27</i>
<i>Controlling the Fear of Death</i>	<i>29</i>
<i>Textual Representations.....</i>	<i>35</i>
<i>Defending the Cult of the Martyrs</i>	<i>39</i>
<i>True and False Martyrs</i>	<i>41</i>
<i>Conclusion: Martyrdom in Context</i>	<i>47</i>

CHAPTER 2: Methods of Representation.....	49
--	-----------

<i>Removing Narrative Structure</i>	<i>50</i>
<i>An Exception: Lawrence.....</i>	<i>53</i>
<i>Avoiding Descriptions of the Tortured Body</i>	<i>56</i>
<i>An Exception: Vincent</i>	<i>61</i>
<i>Censoring Female Nudity.....</i>	<i>64</i>
<i>Deleting the Speeches of the Martyrs</i>	<i>69</i>
<i>Exceptions: Lawrence, Fructuosus, and Donata.....</i>	<i>73</i>
<i>Abstracting the Martyrs' Personal Names</i>	<i>75</i>
<i>Conclusion: Abstraction or Erasure?.....</i>	<i>82</i>

PART TWO: DEPICTING FEMALE MARTYRS

<i>Introduction: Gender Distinction in Martyrdom Narratives</i>	<i>85</i>
---	-----------

CHAPTER 3: Thinking with Women	92
---	-----------

<i>Representation and Reality.....</i>	<i>94</i>
<i>Uncovering Real Women?</i>	<i>99</i>
<i>Women in the Bible.....</i>	<i>102</i>
<i>Biblical Women as Exemplars</i>	<i>106</i>
<i>Full of Mysteries and Pregnant with Symbols.....</i>	<i>116</i>
<i>Female Martyrs: figurae / formae Ecclesiae?.....</i>	<i>122</i>
<i>Blessed Daughters of Mother Church</i>	<i>127</i>
<i>Conclusion: Expanding the Narrative</i>	<i>130</i>

CHAPTER 4: Ambivalent Images: Weak Female Bodies	133
<i>Church Fathers and Women Martyrs</i>	136
<i>Strength for Struggling Souls</i>	145
<i>Making Sense of Weak Women Martyrs</i>	148
<i>Weakness and Subordination?.....</i>	150
<i>Womanly Weakness and Female Frailty</i>	153
<i>Revelations of Divine Truth.....</i>	155
<i>Moulding and Manipulating Memory.....</i>	159
<i>From Weakness to Strength.....</i>	169
<i>Conclusion: Accepting the Ambivalence</i>	181
 CHAPTER 5: Exemplarity, Imitation, and Emotional Engagement	182
<i>Exemplarity and Imitation</i>	184
<i>Engaging the Emotions.....</i>	188
<i>Blush for Shame, Bearded Men!</i>	194
<i>Examples for Women</i>	203
<i>Excursus: Do not Imitate the Martyrs!</i>	215
<i>Conclusion: Depicting Martyrs, Transforming Christians</i>	219
 CONCLUSION: Reflecting on Augustine's Female Martyrs.....	221
 <i>Appendix: The Main Sources for Augustine's Female Martyrs.....</i>	<i>iv</i>
<i>Bibliography.....</i>	<i>xi</i>

ABBREVIATIONS

ACW	Ancient Christian Writers (New York: Paulist Press, 1946-).
ANCL	Ante-Nicene Christian Library (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1867-1896).
ANF	The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to AD 325 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951-).
AJP	<i>American Journal of Philology.</i>
AugStud.	<i>Augustinian Studies.</i>
CH	<i>Church History.</i>
EME	<i>Early Medieval Europe.</i>
FC	The Fathers of the Church (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1947-).
HTR	<i>The Harvard Theological Review.</i>
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion.</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature.</i>
JECS	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies.</i>
JEH	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History.</i>
JFSR	<i>Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion.</i>
JMH	<i>Journal of Medieval History.</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies.</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies.</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1912-).
MA	Germain Morin (ed.), <i>Miscellanea Agostiniana: Testi e Studi. Vol. 1: Sancti Augustini Sermones post Maurinos Reperti</i> (Roma: Tipografia Poliglotta Vaticana, 1930).
NPNF	A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975-79).
PL	Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina, 221 volumes (1844-1855). Accessed online through the Patrologia Latina Database: http://pld.chadwyck.co.uk.ezphost.dur.ac.uk/
REtAug.	<i>Revue des Études Augustiniennes.</i>
RechAug.	<i>Recherches Augustiniennes.</i>
SCH	Studies in Church History.
SP	<i>Studia Patristica.</i>
VigChr.	<i>Vigiliae Christianae.</i>
WSA	<i>The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the Twenty-First Century</i> (New York, N.Y.: New City Press, 1990-).

ABBREVIATIONS: Augustine's Works

ABBREVIATION	LATIN TITLE	ENGLISH TITLE	LATIN EDITION	ENGLISH TRANS.
<i>agon.</i>	<i>De agone Christiano</i>	On the Christian Struggle	PL 40	FC 2
<i>an. et or.</i>	<i>De anima et eius origine</i>	On the Soul and its Origin	PL 44	WSA I/23
<i>bapt.</i>	<i>De baptismo</i>	On Baptism	PL 43	NPNF 4
<i>b. conjug.</i>	<i>De bono conjugali</i>	On the Good of Marriage	PL 40	WSA I/9
<i>b. vid.</i>	<i>De bono viduitatis</i>	On the Good of Widowhood	PL 40	WSA I/9
<i>b. vita</i>	<i>De beata vita</i>	On the Happy Life	PL 32	FC 5
<i>cat. rud.</i>	<i>De catechizandis rudibus</i>	On Teaching the Uninstructed	PL 40	NPNF 3
<i>c. Faust.</i>	<i>Contra Faustum Manicheum</i>	Against Faustus	PL 42	WSA I/20
<i>c. Iul.</i>	<i>Contra Iulianum</i>	Against Julian	PL 44	WSA I/24
<i>c. Iul. imp.</i>	<i>Contra Iulianum opus imperfectum</i>	Against Julian, an Unfinished Book	PL 45	WSA I/25
<i>civ. Dei</i>	<i>De civitate Dei</i>	City of God	PL 41	Dyson: 1998
<i>c. litt. Pet.</i>	<i>Contra litteras Petiliani</i>	Against the Letters of Petilian	PL 43	NPNF 4
<i>conf.</i>	<i>Confessiones</i>	Confessions	PL 32	WSA I/1
<i>cura mort.</i>	<i>De cura pro mortuis gerenda</i>	On the Care to be Taken for the Dead	PL 40	FC 27
<i>corrept.</i>	<i>De correptione et gratia</i>	On Rebuke and Grace	PL 44	WSA I/23
<i>doc. Chr.</i>	<i>De doctrina Christiana</i>	On Christian Teaching	PL 34	Green: 1997

ABBREVIATIONS: Augustine's Works (cont.)

ABBREVIATION	LATIN TITLE	ENGLISH TITLE	LATIN EDITION	ENGLISH TRANS.
<i>en. Ps.</i>	<i>Enarrationes in Psalmos</i>	Commentaries on the Psalms	PL 36-37	WSA III/15-20
<i>ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae</i>	Letters	PL 33	WSA II/1-4
<i>ep. Io.</i>	<i>In epistulam Iohannis ad Parthos tractatus</i>	Tractates on the First Epistle of John	PL 35	FC 92
<i>f. invis.</i>	<i>De fide rerum invisibilium</i>	Faith in Things Unseen	PL 40	FC 4
<i>Gn. litt.</i>	<i>De Genesi ad litteram</i>	Literal Commentary on Genesis	PL 34	ACW 41-42
<i>Gn. adv. Man.</i>	<i>De Genesi adversus Manicheos</i>	On Genesis against the Manichees	PL 34	WSA I/13
<i>Io. ev. tr.</i>	<i>In Iohannis evangelium tractatus</i>	Tractates on the Gospel of John	PL 35	FC 78-79, 88, 90, 92
<i>mor.</i>	<i>De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manicheorum</i>	On the Morals of the Catholic Church and the Morals of the Manichees	PL 32	WSA I/19
<i>nat. et gr.</i>	<i>De natura et gratia</i>	On Nature and Grace	PL 44	WSA I/23
<i>ord.</i>	<i>De ordine</i>	On Order	PL 32	FC 5
<i>s.</i>	<i>Sermones</i>	Sermons	PL 38-39, PLS 2	WSA III/1-11
<i>sol.</i>	<i>Soliloquia</i>	Soliloquies	PL 32	FC 5
<i>Trin.</i>	<i>De Trinitate</i>	On the Trinity	PL 42	WSA I/5
<i>util. cred.</i>	<i>De utilitate credendi</i>	On the Usefulness of Belief	PL 42	FC 4
<i>virg.</i>	<i>De sancta virginitate</i>	On Holy Virginity	PL 40	WSA I/9

Introduction

HOLY WOMEN OF GOD

Augustine of Hippo is one of the most prolific writers and preachers in Christian history. His works have been the subject of such close scrutiny that it is surprising to find so little research on his depictions of female martyrs. The martyrs are not often included in studies of his attitudes towards women, which tend to focus on the female recipients of his *Letters* (*Epistulae*), the women encountered in the *Confessions* (*Confessiones*), or the abstract and theoretical reflections on women in his theological and exegetical treatises, such as *On the Trinity* (*De Trinitate*) and *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis* (*De Genesi ad litteram*).¹ Female martyrs are also overlooked in studies of his reflections on martyrdom, despite the fact that these are key sources that attest to the presence and popularity of women in the North African cult of the martyrs.² This thesis takes the first step towards addressing this oversight by resituating Augustine's depictions of female martyrs in the corpus of his works.

Upon first glance, it might seem as if the female martyrs occupied very little of Augustine's time and thought. Most often he is associated with male martyrs: the overshadowing presence of Cyprian, the North African bishop and martyr *par excellence*;³ his descriptions of the miracles that took place at the discovery of the

¹ For example, female martyrs are not discussed in the following leading studies on Augustine's attitudes towards women: Kari Elisabeth Børresen, 'Patristic "Feminism": The Case of Augustine', *AugStud.* 25 (1994), 139-52; E. Ann Matter, 'De Cura Feminarum: Augustine the Bishop, North African Women, and the Development of a Theology of Female Nature', *AugStud.* 36 (2005), 87-98; Ellen Weaver and Jean Laporte, 'Augustine and Women: Relationships and Teachings', *AugStud.* 12 (1981), 115-31; Richard J. McGovan, 'Augustine's Spiritual Equality: The Allegory of Man and Woman with Regard to *Imago Dei*', *REtAug.* 33 (1987), 255-64; Julia Chelius Stark (ed.), *Feminist Interpretations of Augustine, Re-reading the Canon* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2007); Jean A. Truax, 'Augustine of Hippo: Defender of Women's Equality?', *JMH*, 16 (1990), 279-99.

² The following studies include passing references to female martyrs: Jan den Boeft, "'Martyres Sunt sed Homines Fuerunt': Augustine on Martyrdom", in A. A. R. Bastiaensen, A. Hilhorst, and C. H. Kneepkens (eds.), *Fructus Centesimus: Mélanges Offerts à Gerard J. M. Bartelink à l'Occasion de son Soixante-Cinquième Anniversaire* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989), 115-24, at 115, 119, 120; W. H. C. Frend, 'The North African Cult of Martyrs', in E. Dassmann (ed.), *Jenseitsvorstellungen in Antike und Christentum: Gedenkschrift für Alfred Stuiber* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1982), 154-67, at 163-64; Peter Brown, 'Enjoying the Saints in Late Antiquity', *EME*, 9 (2000b), 1-24, at 12.

³ See especially s. 309 (WSA III/9: 63-66), 310 (WSA III/9: 68-69), 311 (WSA III/9: 71-78), 312 (WSA III/9: 81-84), 313 (WSA III/9: 86-88), 313A (WSA III/9: 90-94), 313B (WSA III/9: 96-100), 313C (WSA III/9: 101-03), 313D (WSA III/9: 104-07), 313E (WSA III/9: 109-16), 313F (WSA III/9: 118-20).

relics of Protasius and Gervasius;⁴ the large number of sermons that he delivered on the apostles and martyrs Peter and Paul;⁵ the numerous sermons that he preached on the famous martyrs Lawrence and Vincent, as well as lesser known male martyrs, such as Quadratus and Fructuosus;⁶ his enthusiastic reception of the relics of the proto-martyr Stephen in the year 415.⁷ Considering this, our immediate impression is that whenever Augustine heard the word “martyr”, his mind conjured up the image of a man.

But, upon closer inspection, a more discerning eye discovers many female faces among the crowd of martyrs that are present in Augustine’s writings and sermons: the popular Carthaginian martyrs Perpetua and Felicitas; the married woman Crispina; the North African women Victoria and Perpetua, and Valeriana and Victoria; the young virgin martyrs Agnes and Thecla; the Spanish martyr Eulalia; the Maccabean Mother; Domnina and her two daughters, Bernike and Prosdoke; the North African matron Donata; Maxima, Donatilla, and Secunda, who remain nameless but are present nonetheless.⁸ Finally, Augustine draws our attention to the presence of many unnamed women who are grouped together, categorised according

⁴ *conf.* 9.7,16 (WSA I/1: 221); *civ. Dei*, 22.8 (Dyson: 1121, 1126); *s.* 286.2, 4 (WSA III/8: 102, 103), 318.1 (WSA III/9: 147).

⁵ *s.* 295 (WSA III/8: 197-201), 296 (WSA III/8: 203-13), 297 (WSA III/8: 216-23), 298 (WSA III/8: 224-27), 299 (WSA III/8: 229-39), 299A (WSA III/8: 241-43), 299B (WSA III/8: 244-48), 299C (WSA III/8: 250-54).

⁶ Lawrence: *s.* 302 (WSA III/8: 300-311), 303 (WSA III/8: 313-14), 304 (WSA III/8: 316-18), 305 (WSA III/8: 320-22), 305A (WSA III/8: 324-32); Vincent: *s.* 274 (WSA III/8: 23-24), 275 (WSA III/8: 26-28), 276 (WSA III/8: 29-31), 277 (WSA III/8: 33-45), 277A (WSA III/8: 47-49); Quadratus: *s.* 306B (WSA III/9: 28-34), 306C (WSA III/9: 36-42), 306D (WSA III/9: 43-46); Fructuosus: *s.* 273 (WSA III/8: 17-21).

⁷ For example, *s.* 314 (WSA III/9: 126-27), 315 (WSA III/9: 129-35), 316 (WSA III/9: 137-40), 317 (WSA III/9: 142-46), 318 (WSA III/9: 147-49), 319 (WSA III/9: 151-54), 320 (WSA III/9: 157); *civ. Dei*, 22.8 (Dyson: 1128-34).

⁸ Perpetua and Felicitas: *s.* 159A.11 (WSA III/11: 142), 280 (WSA III/8: 72-77), 281 (WSA III/8: 78-79), 282 (WSA III/8: 81-82) *en. Ps.* 47.13 (WSA III/16: 347); *an. et or.* 1.10.12, 2.10.14, 2.12.16, 3.9.12, 4.17.25, 4.18.26-27 (WSA I/23: 479, 506-07, 522, 550-52). Crispina: *en. Ps.* 120 (III/19: 510-29), 137 (WSA III/20: 242-55); *s.* 286.2 (WSA III/8: 102), 313G.3 (WSA III/9: 124), 354.5 (WSA III/10: 158); *virg.* 44,45 (WSA I/9: 98). Victoria and Perpetua: *s.* 335A.1 (WSA III/9: 211-12). Valeriana and Victoria: *s.* 325.1 (WSA III/9: 168). Agnes: *s.* 53.1 (WSA III/3: 66), 273.6 (WSA III/8: 19-20), 286.2 (WSA III/8: 102), 354.5 (WSA III/10: 158). Thecla: *virg.* 44,45 (WSA I/9: 98). Eulalia: *s.* 313G.3 (WSA III/9: 124). The Maccabean Mother: *s.* 100.2 (WSA III/4: 61), 286.6 (WSA III/8: 104), 300 (WSA III/8: 276-80), 301 (WSA III/8: 282-88); *an. et or.* (WSA I/23: 485-86); *c. Iul.* 5.15,53 (WSA I/24: 466); *en. Ps.* 68(2).3 (WSA III/17: 385), 243.6 (WSA II/4: 167); *mor.* 1.23,43 (WSA I/19: 51-52); *corrupt.* 41 (WSA I/26: 137-38). Bernike, Prosdoke, and Domnina: *civ. Dei*, 1.26 (Dyson: 38-39). Donata: *s.* 37.23 (WSA III/2: 197). Maxima, Donatilla, and Secunda: *s.* 345 (WSA III/10: 58-66). See Appendix.

to their sex, and variously referred to as women, wives, mothers, girls, or virgins.⁹ It is clear, then, that Augustine perceived and presented the martyrs as a mixed group comprised of men and women, young and old, husbands, wives, and virgins.

Yet, while Augustine deliberately drew attention to the women among the martyrs, throughout the centuries the female martyrs have been lost and buried amid his sermons and treatises. With the exception of Perpetua and Felicitas, his female martyrs have remained hidden and out of sight.¹⁰ In this thesis we will attempt to reconstruct Augustine's original interest in the female martyrs by relocating them in the context of his sermons and treatises, exploring their importance in his theological reflection, and considering their usefulness in his pastoral ministry.

The main aim of this thesis is to demonstrate that Augustine's female martyrs are profound and complex images. We will show that Augustine was not compelled to produce depictions of female martyrs simply to satisfy the tastes and expectations of popular piety. Rather, they are creative, original, and idiosyncratic images that arise from his conscious decision and personal desire to find meaning in the memory of the female martyrs. Augustine actively worked to perpetuate, modify, and apply the memory of the martyrs in his present day. While the female martyrs were rooted in a persecuted past, his depictions ensured that their significance would transcend historical and geographical particularities to reverberate in the present moment and resonate into the future.

Context

This thesis is located within the wider context of the recent revival of scholarly interest in early Christian interpretations of martyrdom.¹¹ Current scholarship in this

⁹ *Io. ev. tr.* 51.13 (FC 88: 279), 96.1(3) (FC 90: 194); *s.* 64A.3 (WSA III/3: 190), 68.13 (WSA III/3: 232), 143.5 (WSA III/4: 428), 295.8 (WSA III/8: 201), 299D.7 (WSA III/8: 261), 299E.1 (WSA III/8: 263), 305A.2 (WSA III/8: 325), 306.10 (WSA III/9: 23-24), 351.11 (WSA III/10: 132); *mor.* 1.35,77 (WSA I/19: 66-67). See Appendix.

¹⁰ We give further attention to this observation in Chapter 4 (*Making Sense of Weak Women Martyrs*). For Perpetua and Felicitas, see Kenneth B. Steinhauser, 'Augustine's Reading of the *Passio Sanctarum Perpetuae et Felicitatis*', *SP*, 33 (1997), 244-49; Gertrude Gillette, 'Augustine and the Significance of Perpetua's Words: "And I was a Man"', *AugStud.* 32 (2001), 115-25; John Kitchen, 'Going to the Gate of Life: The Archaeology of the Carthage Amphitheatre and Augustine's Sermons on Saints Perpetua and Felicitas', in Georgiana Donavin, Cary J. Nederman, and Richard Utz (eds.), *Speculum Sermonis: Interdisciplinary Reflections on the Medieval Sermon* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2004), 29-51.

¹¹ The seminal study is Peter Brown, *The Cult of the Saints: Its Rise and Function in Latin Christianity*, The Haskell Lectures on History of Religions (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981, repr. 1982). Other, more recent, influential studies include: Elizabeth Castelli, *Martyrdom and*

area looks beyond the traditional perception of martyr *acta* and *passiones* (martyrdom narratives) as historical documents that can help us to reconstruct the past. While previously these texts had been deemed worthy of attention only on account of their proven authenticity or historical veracity, now they are all valued as important literary sources that have much to tell us about the communities and environments in which they were produced.¹² This approach does not deny the historical value of the sources, but rather it appreciates that they are a special kind of historical document. So Sebastian Brock and Susan Ashbrook Harvey describe Syriac martyr *acta* as ‘an important kind of historical evidence about how a given group understands its own history’.¹³

This shift in focus has arisen, in part, from an awareness that martyrdom narratives never were written as objective accounts. Every textual portrait of a martyr reveals a prior judgement that inscribes meaning and purpose into seemingly meaningless events to present condemned criminals as religious heroes; horrific tortures as spiritual trials; public deaths as cosmic dramas. Elizabeth Castelli explains the centrality of this subjective interpretation of death as martyrdom: ‘From the earliest of sources onward, it becomes clear that the early Christians positioned the historical experience of persecution almost immediately within a framework of meaning that drew upon broader metanarratives about temporality, suffering and sacrifice, and identity’.¹⁴ Considering this, we should not perceive rhetorical

Memory: Early Christian Culture Making, Gender, Theory and Religion (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); Kate Cooper, ‘The Voice of the Victim: Gender, Representation and Early Christian Martyrdom’, *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 80 (1998), 147-57; Lucy Grig, *Making Martyrs in Late Antiquity* (London: Duckworth, 2004), 146-51; Johan Leemans, et al., *Let us Die That We May Live. Greek Homilies on Christian Martyrs from Asia Minor, Palestine and Syria (c. AD 350-AD 450)* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003); Joyce E. Salisbury, *Blood of Martyrs: Unintended Consequences of Ancient Violence* (London; New York: Routledge, 2004).

¹² These comments refer to the valuable work of the Bollandists, who carefully used martyr *acta* to reconstruct the historical context of early Christianity. Likewise, in his book, *The Acts of the Christian Martyrs*, Herbert Musurillo selects only those *acta* that he considers to be most historical or authentic: ‘I have chosen twenty-eight of the texts which I consider to be the most reliable or indeed, in the case of those with fictional elements (like the *Martyrdom of Pionius* [...]), extremely important and instructive’ (Musurillo [2000], xi-xii, 1-lvii, at xii). But this approach can result in the disregard (and denigration) of the more elaborate or “fictional” elements of martyrdom narratives. For example, De Ste. Croix says: ‘the vast majority of the later Passions are tasteless affairs and historically worthless, and some of them are rather disgusting’ (cited in Grig [2002], 321). For a succinct review of approaches to martyrdom narratives, see Grig (2004), 146-51.

¹³ Sebastian P. Brock and Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Holy Women of the Syrian Orient*, The Transformation of the Classical Heritage, vol. 13 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 3.

¹⁴ Castelli (2004), 25.

devices, literary tropes, artistic embellishments, or miraculous occurrences as suspicious interpolations into objective historical documents, but as elements that are significant in their own right. These are the very details that make martyrs: they turn death into martyrdom, and the dead into martyrs.

This shift in focus changes our perception of textual depictions of the martyrs. We become more aware that the depictions are artificial in the sense that they are constructed and produced by an author who works as a craftsman. So, recent studies of martyrdom highlight the fact that martyrs are “made” by a creative process of commemoration, representation, and interpretation.¹⁵ That is, a person does not naturally become a martyr at the moment of his or her death, but rather martyrs are made by individual or communal memory-work. As Elizabeth Castelli puts it: ‘the designation “martyr” is not an ontological category but a post-event interpretive one’.¹⁶

This process of making martyrs was not natural or inevitable, but rather it was guided and controlled by authority figures, who acted as artists and authors. Working with the freedom of artistic licence and authorial control, these men were not constrained by fidelity to historical accuracy. Perceiving the past through the lens of the present, they appropriated the memory of the martyrs, inscribed their own experiences and concerns onto the historical figures, and transformed the martyrs into mouthpieces to communicate and validate their own opinions and beliefs. This weaving of the present into the past collapsed distances of time to result in a closer identification between the represented martyr and the audience to whom the representation was delivered. The audience was encouraged to identify with the martyr, take their words to heart, and imitate their actions. In this way, the memory of the martyrs was adopted and adapted for pastoral, theological, and ecclesiological purposes. The carefully constructed depictions of the martyrs became fertile and generative images that informed Christian identity, ethics, ideals, and beliefs. Consequently, early Christian depictions of the martyrs are not just products of a dynamic process of commemoration, representation, and interpretation, but they

¹⁵ See especially Castelli (2004); Grig (2004); Salisbury (2004).

¹⁶ Elizabeth Castelli, ‘The Ambivalent Legacy of Violence and Victimhood: Using Early Christian Martyrs to Think With’, *Spiritus*, 6 (2006), 1-24, at 1.

were also used as tools to produce, construct, and edify the communities in which they themselves were formed.

Considering the wider context of research on early Christian interpretations of martyrdom, it is surprising that there has been so little interest in Augustine's depictions of the martyrs. The majority of studies in this area are traditional explorations of the social, geographical, and political factors that shaped Augustine's attitudes towards the cult of the martyrs.¹⁷ Recent observations on the process of "making martyrs" have not had such an impact on the study of Augustine's sermons or treatises as they have for Greek martyr homilies,¹⁸ or Latin martyr poems.¹⁹ Jonathan Yates and Lucy Grig have both taken steps in this direction by exploring Augustine's appeal to Cyprian during the Pelagian and Donatist controversies.²⁰ But still there is a great deal of research to be done. It is hoped that, by exploring how Augustine constructs and employs depictions of female martyrs, this thesis will illustrate the potential value of continued research in this area.

In this thesis we explore how Augustine reformed and transformed the memory of the martyrs to produce depictions of female martyrs. We will not try to uncover the real, flesh-and-blood women martyrs that lie beneath Augustine's

¹⁷ For example, van Bavel (1995); den Boeft (1989); Quasten (1940).

¹⁸ For John Chrysostom, see Wendy Mayer, *St. John Chrysostom: The Cult of the Saints*, Popular Patristics Series (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2006); Carole Straw, 'Chrysostom's Martyrs: Zealous Athletes and the Dangers of Sloth', in *Giovanni Crisostomo: Oriente e Occidente tra IV e V secolo: XXXIII Incontro di Studiosi dell'Antichità Cristiana, Roma, 6-8 Maggio, 2004* (Rome: Institutum patristicum Augustinianum, 2005), 521-554. For the Cappadocians, see Johan Leemans, 'Martyr, Monk and Victor of Paganism: An Analysis of Basil of Caesarea's Panegyric Sermon on Gordius', in *idem* (ed.), *More than a Memory* (2005b), 45-80; *idem*, 'Style and Meaning in Gregory of Nyssa's Panegyrics on Martyrs', *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovaniensis*, 81 (2005c), 109-29; James C. Skedros, 'The Cappadocian Fathers on the Veneration of the Martyrs', *SP*, 38 (2001), 294-300. For Asterius, see Elizabeth Castelli, 'Asterius of Amasea: Ekphrasis on the Holy Martyr Euphemia', in Richard Valantasis (ed.), *Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice*, Princeton Readings in Religions (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 464-68; Lisa D. Maugans Driver, 'The Cult of the Martyrs in Asterius of Amaseia's Vision of the Christian City', *CH*, 74 (2005), 136-254. For Greek sources in general, see Leemans et al. (2003); Johan Leemans, "'Schoolrooms for our Souls": The Cult of the Martyrs: Homilies and Visual Representations as a Locus for Religious Education in Late Antiquity', in *Paedagogica Historica*, 36 (2000), 113-27.

¹⁹ For Prudentius, see, for example, Burrus (1995); Robert Levine, 'Prudentius's Romanus: The Rhetorician as Hero, Martyr, Satirist, and Saint', *Rhetorica*, 9 (1991), 5-38; Anne-Marie Palmer, *Prudentius on the Martyrs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989); J. Petruccione, 'The Persecutor's Envy and the Rise of the Martyr Cult: "Peristephanon" Hymns 1 and 4', *VigChr*, 45 (1991), 327-46; *idem*, 'The Portrait of St. Eulalia of Mérida in Prudentius' "Peristephanon" 3', *Analecta Bollandiana*, 108 (1990), 81-104; Michael J. Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs: The Liber Peristephanon of Prudentius* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993).

²⁰ Grig (2004), 27-53; Jonathan Yates, 'Augustine's Appropriation of Cyprian the Martyr-Bishop Against the Pelagians', in Leemans (2005a), 119-35.

depictions. Instead of trying to expose the historical core of truth contained deep within his depictions of female martyrs, we will focus on the outer shell that might easily be overlooked or discarded: the elaborations, amplifications, exaggerations, distortions, abstractions, and erasures. Our focus will not be on the *lives* of the historical women, but on their *afterlives*; we will see how the female martyrs were revived, reformed, and transformed whenever he depicted them. In many ways, this transformation arose from the inevitable modifications and mutations that are bound to occur whenever anybody remembers the past from their own subjective viewpoint. But Augustine's depictions of female martyrs were not formed solely from the subconscious ideas that spring to mind spontaneously or slip silently into the picture. Nor can they be understood by comparison with the subtle but unavoidable variations that appear with each stroke of the artist's brush as he or she reproduces the painting of a great master. Rather, they are intentional and deliberate attempts to reform the memory of the martyrs.

Thesis Structure

Augustine did not only reflect on female martyrs on those occasions when he spoke explicitly about women among the martyrs. Women are also included in his more general references to "the martyrs". For this reason, Part One (*Painting Portraits of the Martyrs*) sets out the broad context of Augustine's depictions of both male and female martyrs. Here we explore a number of important factors that helped to shape and colour his depictions of the martyrs: the context of martyr festivals, the expectations of his audience, the medium in which he delivered the depictions (orally or textually), his methods of representing the martyrs, and his attempt to control how his audience would perceive, receive, and respond to his depictions of the martyrs. Chapter One (*The Influence of the Audience*) considers the environment in which he depicted the martyrs. Here we see that his audiences were not passive recipients of his words, but rather they had an active role in the formation of his depictions of the martyrs. As we will see, the martyrs were conceived in the intimate interaction between the preacher and his audience. Chapter Two (*Methods of Representation*) presents an overview of the five main methods of representation that Augustine used to depict the martyrs: i) erasing narrative detail; ii) avoiding descriptions of torture; iii) censoring female nudity; iv) removing the words of the martyrs; v) abstracting the martyrs' personal names. By exploring these methods (as well as some

exceptions), this chapter gives us a better understanding of how Augustine engaged in the process of making martyrs.

While Augustine's depictions of female martyrs share many things in common with his depictions of male martyrs, they are also very different. We explore these differences in Part Two (*Depicting Female Martyrs*). Throughout these three chapters we see how Augustine appealed to femininity, gender stereotypes, and the rhetoric of gender to construct his depictions of female martyrs. Chapter Three (*Thinking with Women*) is an extended introduction in which we see how literary depictions of women influenced the way that Augustine perceived, depicted, and used the female martyrs. In particular, in this chapter we consider how the underlying "logic of representation" that is evident in his depictions of real, biblical, or imaginary women relates to his depictions of female martyrs. Chapter Four (*Ambivalent Images: Weak Female Bodies*) discusses how Augustine used the female martyrs to communicate theological messages. Here we focus specifically on the theological messages that are conveyed by the ambivalent image of the female martyr who is at once a *mulier mollis* and a *femina fortis*. Chapter Five (*Exemplarity, Imitation, and Emotional Engagement*) considers how Augustine used depictions of female martyrs in a pastoral context. By focusing on the interlocking themes of exemplarity, imitation, and the emotions, we see how Augustine presented female martyrs as exemplars to be imitated by the men and women in his congregations.

It is worth noting that two themes form an undercurrent to these five chapters. The first is that depictions of female martyrs are not just reflective, but also projective. Augustine's depictions of female martyrs are not orientated with a backward glance to a distant past, but their very existence, meaning, and purpose is directed towards the present and the future. The second, associated theme is the relationship between representation and reality; the two-way conversation between the cognitive and the concrete. While Augustine's representations of female martyrs do not necessarily reflect reality, they are constructed with the specific intention of having a direct impact on the real, concrete lives of Christian men and women. These themes, surfacing at different points throughout the thesis, remind us that Augustine's depictions of female martyrs are not obscure sidelines to more immediate and pressing matters, but they are important parts of the wider process of

shaping and defining Christian identity, faith, and piety over and against the competing identities, cultures, and belief-systems that existed in Augustine's North Africa.

Methodology

In this thesis we hope to demonstrate that Augustine's depictions of female martyrs can help us to paint a richer and deeper picture of the North African bishop: his personal beliefs, his theological reflections, and his response to the needs and desires of his congregations. While this is a study of female martyrs, it is not written with a feminist agenda. While it has been informed by concepts such as collective memory and social identity theory, it is not a direct application of theory. Our primary concern is not with the human power relationships that are constructed and maintained through depictions of martyrs, but with the interpretation of martyrdom as a visible manifestation of divine power and a revelation of the right relationship between humankind and God. In fact, the basic methodological approach and underlying motivation for this thesis might be most clearly expressed as "a theologically sensitive reading" of Augustine's female martyrs. As we will see, a theologically sensitive reading is the best – perhaps the only – way to approach Augustine's female martyrs, which are, first and foremost, theological images. They provide ways of thinking about, talking about, and responding to, the relationship between God and humankind.

An important point to mention in relation to method is that Augustine did not produce a systematic treatment of female martyrs. Because of this, we are left to piece together the individual references to female martyrs that are scattered and strewn throughout his works. Consequently, we must adopt a synchronic approach to see how the isolated fragments might be collected together and placed side-by-side to reflect Augustine's thought. While doing this, we must be aware of the limits and disadvantages of this method. We will try to avoid taking strands from different sources to weave our own pictures, or speaking our own opinions into the sources so that we hear only the echo of our own voices.

In taking this approach we will not attempt to fill in the gaps to present Augustine's depictions of female martyrs as complete and polished pieces. To prevent us from forcing his views into a wholly consistent pattern, throughout this study we will explore not only what he *does* say about the female martyrs, but also

what he does *not* say. For a thesis that aims to draw attention to Augustine's female martyrs, it might come as a surprise that we will be directing some of our attention towards listening to silences and reading between lines. But these silences are telling signs, which, at times, are most surprising, intriguing, and perplexing. Often what he omits is just as important as what he includes. Augustine's methods of representing the martyrs – whether regarded positively as features that we can read, see, and assess, or negatively as shadows or absences or resistance – reveal a considered, and even cautious, use of the martyrs.

A Note on Sources

Wherever it has been considered necessary, brief contextual details of primary sources have been provided. However, because of limits of length, these have been kept to a minimum. Considering the prominence of sermons in this study, and the notorious difficulty of dating and locating the sermons, it is not always possible to provide contextual details, as much as we would benefit from them.²¹ Where dates have been provided, these are the suggested dates in *Augustine through the Ages*.²² The numbering of the *Sermons* and the *Commentaries on the Psalms* (*Enarrationes in Psalmos*) follows that of *The Works of Saint Augustine*.²³

Augustine's works are referred to by the English translation of the Latin title when they appear in the body of the text. When each work is first mentioned, the English title is followed by the Latin original in brackets. In the footnotes, the titles of Augustine's works are abbreviated according to the standard Latin abbreviations in *Augustine through the Ages*.²⁴ Finally, a list of Augustine's main references to female martyrs can be found in the Appendix.

²¹ For background on the sermons, see the extended introduction of Michele Pellegrino in WSA III/1: 13-131. For the problems of dating the sermons, see Hubertus R. Drobner, 'The Chronology of Augustine's *Sermones ad populum*', *AugStud.* 31 (2000), 211-18; *idem.* 'The Chronology of Augustine's *Sermones ad populum* II: Sermons 5 to 8', *AugStud.* 34 (2003), 49-66; *idem.* 'The Chronology of Augustine's *Sermones ad populum* III: on Christmas Day', *AugStud.* 35 (2004), 43-53.

²² Allan D. Fitzgerald (ed.), *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopaedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 774-89.

²³ *Sermones* = John E. Rotelle (ed.), trans. Edmund Hill, *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the Twenty-First Century*, III/1-11 (New York: New City Press, 1990-97). *Enarrationes in Psalmos* = John E. Rotelle and Boniface Ramsey (eds.), trans. Maria Boulding *The Works of Saint Augustine: A Translation for the Twenty-First Century*, III/15-20 (New York: New City Press, 2000-04).

²⁴ Fitzgerald (1999), xxxv-xlii.

Part One

ABSTRACTING IMAGES AND BLURRING PORTRAITS

Introduction

PAINTING PORTRAITS OF THE MARTYRS

The figures of the martyrs possess a haunting presence in Augustine's writing and preaching. This does not come as a surprise considering that he perceived himself to be living in a land filled with the bodies, and sprinkled with the blood, of the martyrs.²⁵ For Augustine, the pervasive power of the martyrs extends from the past to the present, and reaches from earth to heaven: the soil is reddened with the blood of the martyrs, churches are decorated with their shrines, miracles are performed through their relics, calendars are full of their feast days, and heaven blossoms with the flowers of their crowns.²⁶ Augustine tells us that almost every day is the celebration of a martyr festival; every day the word "martyr" dwells on the lips of the pious Christian.²⁷ Despite the hyperbole, the martyrs were clearly seen by many to be heroes of a special kind. For Augustine, their devout humility and perfect sacrifice distinguished them from among the *massa peccati*, and marked them out as members of God's elect. They were exceptional, yet exemplary, members of the Church body, who acted in perfect concordance and conformation with Christ, their head.

Before we explore how Augustine depicts the martyrs, we must consider how he perceived his own role in depicting the martyrs. Unlike Paulinus of Nola, Augustine did not associate his conversion to Christianity with a personal devotion to the cult of a particular martyr.²⁸ Unlike Ambrose, he could not claim to be the close descendent of a famous female martyr.²⁹ Unlike Prudentius, he apparently never felt the desire to write poems to celebrate his local martyrs.³⁰ How, then, did he consider his role in depicting the martyrs? Often it can be difficult to discern an author's intention in writing a text or preaching a sermon. But the recent discovery of a

²⁵ *ep.* 78.3 (WSA: 305).

²⁶ *en. Ps.* 118(30).5 (WSA III/19: 486).

²⁷ *s.* 305A.1 (WSA III/8: 324); *ep. Io.* 1.2(1) (FC 92: 122).

²⁸ For Paulinus and Felix, see Dennis E. Trout, *Paulinus of Nola: Life, Letters, and Poems* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 160-97.

²⁹ For Ambrose and Soteris, see Ambrose, *On Virgins*, 3.7.38 (Ramsey: 116).

³⁰ Prudentius, *Peristephanon* (LCL 398: 99-153). See also Palmer (1989).

collection of Augustine's letters ("the Divjak letters") sheds some light on how he understood his relationship with the martyrs.³¹

The last letter in the collection is addressed to Paulinus of Milan, Ambrose's biographer.³² Paulinus had asked Augustine to compile a written document on the martyrs, and had sent him a collection of *acta martyrum* to illustrate the kind of text that he was requesting. In this letter, written between the years 412 and 413, Augustine replies to Paulinus to decline his request: 'I do not yet see, though I desire to do so very much, how I may carry out your wishes concerning the publication of the acts of the martyrs in our own language'.³³ Augustine's decision was not based on a denial of the validity or worth of hagiography. On the contrary, he expresses a high regard for Ambrose's writings on the martyrs, which, he says, 'delighted me so that I was moved to do something of the sort when I spoke with Your Charity'.³⁴ Far from being passed off as elaborations or fabrications, Augustine says that the additional details made Ambrose's accounts extremely valuable: 'his work seems not only not superfluous but also highly necessary'.³⁵ His admiration for Ambrose's work is clear: 'I held him before me as a model compared to the others whose accounts I had read on this topic'.³⁶ But Augustine did not feel that he could imitate him. In his writings, Ambrose had included additional details that were not found in the public records of martyrdom: details that Augustine neither knew nor felt that he could discover. He asks Paulinus: 'what am I to do, since I do not have any way of knowing what one should know about the martyrs apart from the public records, except for the works I had read of those who have preceded me in this undertaking?'.³⁷

Augustine was left with two options for retelling the stories of the martyrs. He could rewrite the stories with the additional details that were already included by other authors, but his writings would be unnecessary and superfluous. Alternatively,

³¹ For background see Henry Chadwick, 'New Letters of Saint Augustine', *JTS*, 34 (1983), 425-52.

³² *ep.* 29* (WSA II/4: 333-34).

³³ *ibid.* 1 (333).

³⁴ *ibid.* 2 (333).

³⁵ *ibid.*

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ *ibid.* 2 (334).

he could rewrite the stories in his own words, without any additional details.³⁸ Augustine rejects this latter option twice in the course of the short letter: ‘I fear that I will not add to the feeling of genuineness that they produced for me’; ‘if I want to recount in my own words only what I have read in the public records, I will be trying to make the account less vivid rather than more vivid’.³⁹ These explanations allow us to see how Augustine understood his relationship with the martyrs. He is reluctant to retell the stories of the martyrs unless his words would elicit the same response that he had experienced when he read Ambrose’s writings. For Augustine, the stories of the martyrs are only valuable when they rouse the emotions, incite change, and illuminate and transform the reader. And so, we find that, whenever he depicted the martyrs, his object of attention was not only the martyrs, but also the readers and listeners who would receive the depictions. The martyrs are the subject of the representations, but only insofar as they act upon the audience to effect a response.

In his letter to Paulinus, Augustine suggests that he did not consider himself to be an author or compiler of writings about the martyrs. Yet, the martyrs appear interspersed throughout his writings and sermons. Augustine makes frequent appeals to the martyrs in the context of his theological, polemical, and pastoral reflections and teachings: to instruct his congregations at martyr festivals;⁴⁰ to illustrate his scriptural exegesis in sermons on the gospels;⁴¹ to aid his expositions of the Psalms;⁴² to serve as tools in polemical battles;⁴³ to address the anxiety that was felt after the Sack of Rome.⁴⁴

While Augustine’s depictions of the martyrs are not formed with the same poetic flourishes as Prudentius’s martyrs, or the deep emotional intensity of

³⁸ *ibid.* 1 (333).

³⁹ *ibid.* 1, 2 (333, 334).

⁴⁰ See WSA III/8-9 for Augustine’s sermons on the saints. See also A. M. La Bonnardière, ‘Les Enarrationes in Psalmos prêchées par Saint Augustin à l’occasion des fêtes de martyrs’, *RechAug.* 7 (1971), 73-104. For a reconstruction of Augustine’s calendar of saints, see C. Lambot, ‘Les Sermons de Saint Augustin pour les Fêtes des Martyrs’, *Revue Bénédictine*, 79 (1969), 82-97.

⁴¹ For example, *Io. ev. tr.* 3.21(1) (FC 78: 91-92), 6.23(3) (FC 78: 150-51), 21.14(3) (FC 79: 193), 64.4(3) (FC 90: 49), 65.3(1) (FC 90: 53).

⁴² See the examples listed in Bonnardière (1971).

⁴³ For example, *ep.* 88.8-9 (WSA II/1: 356-57), 89.2-3 (WSA II/1: 359-60); *Io. ev. tr.* 6.23(3) (FC 78: 150-51); 11.15(1-2) (FC 79: 26-27); *ep. Io.* 6.2(1) (FC 92: 199-200); *c. Iul.* 4.7,38 (WSA I/24: 403), 6.18,55 (WSA I/24: 513), 6.26,83 (WSA I/24: 533-34); *c. Faust.* 20.21 (WSA I/20: 278-80).

⁴⁴ Peter Ivan Kaufman, ‘Augustine, Martyrs, and Misery’, *CH*, 63 (1994), 1-14.

Chrysostom's martyrs, they are highly subjective images that are shaped by personal experiences, attitudes, and beliefs. As we will see throughout this thesis, Augustine's depictions of the martyrs reflect the problems with which he was continually engaged: the relationship between the Creator and creation, the fallen nature of mankind, the infinite mercy of God, the necessity of the Incarnation, the centrality of grace, the value of humility, the need for rightly ordered love, the significance of the Scriptures, and the hope for eternal life. In sum, the martyrs provided Augustine with microcosms of the Christian life. Often seeming to paint portraits of the martyrs with the medium of words, his main focus was not just the martyrs, but also the ideas that they embody, the messages they communicate, and the truths they reveal.

Brief Overview of Part One

Part One of this thesis lays the groundwork for the main focus of the study by exploring how Augustine depicts both male and female martyrs. Most patristic depictions of the martyrs are marked by a distinctly elaborate and imaginative flair. Here we might think of Basil's panegyric on Gordius, Chrysostom's homily on Romanus, or Asterius's *ekphrasis* on Euphemia. In contrast, Augustine's depictions of the martyrs are comparatively subtle and understated. As we will see, his methods of representation amount to a process of abstraction, erasure, censoring, and silencing. At first this might seem to be evidence of his disinterest or indifference towards the martyrs. For example, when we compare Augustine's sermon on Eulalia with Chrysostom's sermon on Drosis, we might be struck by Augustine's curt and seemingly superficial reference to Eulalia in comparison to Chrysostom's enthusiastic and developed panegyric on Drosis.⁴⁵ But, of course, this is an unfair comparison. We must consider the broader context of the representations: the social, geographical, and religious factors; the physical location in which the description was made; the author's intentions for depicting the martyr; the position of the martyrs in the author's wider theological framework; the audience to whom the depiction was presented. In the first part of this thesis we address these two interlocking themes of context and representation.

⁴⁵ Augustine, *s.* 313G.3 (WSA III/9: 124); Chrysostom, *A Homily on the Martyr Drosis* (Mayer: 191-207).

Chapter 1

THE INFLUENCE OF THE AUDIENCE

Whenever Augustine depicted the martyrs, he knew that he was not impressing new images on clean tablets of wax. His audience approached him with their minds already fashioned and formed by the expectations and anticipations that arose from their common cultural assumptions and social conventions, their shared religious beliefs, their educational and economic backgrounds, the differences in their age, sex, and marital status. A plethora of images and ideas lay dormant in their minds, waiting to be revived by his words to subconsciously colour the portraits that he painted.

It is clear, then, that Augustine's depictions of the martyrs were not conjured from a vacuum, forged in solitary isolation, or created *ex nihilo*. Rather, they contain echoes of popular oral and textual traditions about the martyrs. They use and transform traditional notions of heroic virtue, noble death, and commemoration of the dead. They point back to the words of the Old Testament prophets, adopt images found in the passion narratives, and develop metaphors drawn from Paul's epistles. They are shaped by ecclesiastical controversies concerning orthodoxy, unity, and the relationship between Church and Empire. They are built on the foundations of his theological reflections on creation, the Fall, and redemption.

Augustine shaped his depictions of the martyrs in anticipation of how his audience would receive them: how they would read, hear, remember, imagine, respond to, or even resist and reject, his representations of the martyrs. Because of this, his readers and listeners became implicated in the process of making martyrs. On one level, the influence of the audience is seen in the careful thought that Augustine aspired to give to all of his communications. The images, and the messages that they convey, had to be presented clearly, in language that would be understood by his audience, and in a style that would elicit the intended response. But also, on a deeper level, the audience played a more central role by actively influencing the depictions of the martyrs through their own existential fears, eschatological hopes, and worldly aspirations. Although Augustine adapted his depictions of the martyrs to suit particular audiences, his depictions were not products of a one-way communication, but rather they were elements in an

interactive and dynamic process. His audiences exerted a subtle force that helped to shape his presentation of the martyrs.

In this chapter we explore some of the factors that influenced Augustine's depictions of the martyrs. While our focus will be on both male and female martyrs, it is particularly important that we consider context before we approach the female martyrs. As we mentioned briefly in the introduction to this study, Augustine's references to female martyrs are scattered throughout his works. By considering the wider contexts in which he depicted them, we can begin to reconstruct the background against which they should be seen.

Martyr Festivals

Most of Augustine's reflections on the martyrs are found in his immense corpus of sermons.⁴⁶ He delivered many of these sermons at martyr festivals, often at the special location of the martyrs' graves or shrines in and around Hippo and Carthage.⁴⁷ The typically exuberant celebration of martyr festivals in North Africa meant that there was little need for Augustine to encourage his audience to venerate the martyrs further.⁴⁸ Rather, he used his sermons to control the veneration of the martyrs. He tried to channel the enthusiasm, harness the fervour, and eradicate the superstitions, of the celebrants.⁴⁹

Augustine's sermons encourage us to envisage martyr festivals as high-spirited occasions. People dressed to impress, they gathered together to socialise and

⁴⁶ These collections have come down to us today as the *Sermons* (*Sermones*), the *Commentaries on the Psalms* (*Enarrationes in Psalmos*), the *Tractates on the Gospel of John* (*In Iohannis evangelium tractatus*), and the *Tractates on the Epistle of John* (*In epistulam Iohannis ad Parthos tractatus*).

⁴⁷ For background on martyr sermons, see further Lambot (1969), esp. 82-90; la Bonnardière (1971), esp. 104. For a description of North African martyr festivals, see Frederik van der Meer, *Augustine the Bishop: The Life and Work of a Father of the Church*, trans. B. Battershaw and G. R. Lamb (London: Sheed and Ward, 1961, 2nd ed. 1978), 490-91.

⁴⁸ Possible exceptions to this rule include the case of the Maccabees, whose cult had recently emerged. See s. 300.2, 6 (WSA III/8: 276-77, 279): 'when you are admiring these martyrs, you should not think they were not Christians... the Maccabees really are martyrs of Christ. That is why it is not unsuitable, not in the least improper, but on the contrary absolutely right for their day and their solemnity to be celebrated especially by Christians'. For the cult of the Maccabean Martyrs, with some brief remarks on Augustine's views on it, see Gerard Rouwhorst, 'The Emergence of the Cult of the Maccabean Martyrs in Late Antique Christianity', in Leemans (2005a), 81-96, esp. 88-89.

⁴⁹ van der Meer (1961), 471-97.

gossip, they drank alcohol, and they danced at grave-sides.⁵⁰ While these descriptions should not prevent us from perceiving at least some of these actions as genuine manifestations of piety and devotion to the martyrs,⁵¹ Augustine was concerned that the feasts of the martyrs had begun to resemble pagan festivals, complete with disgraceful songs and lewd dances.⁵² In this context, his sermons served as powerful tools to bring order and sobriety to the martyr festivals in the North African Church. Just as Ambrose had corrected Monica when she tried to perform the traditional custom of offering food at the graves of the martyrs (the *refrigerium*), so Augustine aimed to correct his congregation's devotion to the martyrs.⁵³ We get the impression that he had hoped for his audience to respond with the same pious submission as his mother, who had 'seen the wisdom of bringing to the martyrs' shrines not a basket full of the fruits of the earth, but a heart full of more purified offerings, her prayers'.⁵⁴ With a firm and authoritative tone, Augustine urges his listeners: 'please do not celebrate the feast days of Christian saints in the same way as drunkards do... it is one thing to signify joy by easing off fasting, another to thrust aside justice by overloading your hearts and drinking yourselves silly'.⁵⁵ The martyrs should be honoured with sober and solemn celebration, which should temper the passions but set hearts aflame: 'Visit the shrines of the martyrs in such a way as to remember them with devotion, and, by honouring the martyrs, to stir your hearts to feel a greater love for God'.⁵⁶

But Augustine was careful in his control of the festivals. While his words were stern, and his tone persuasive, he realised the importance of the cult of the martyrs for popular piety. Martyr festivals could be threatened by the alternative entertainments of pagan festivals and spectacle performances (*spectacula*).⁵⁷ The attractions (or, for Augustine, distractions) of *spectacula* are suggested in his

⁵⁰ For example, s. 273.7-8 (WSA III/8: 20-21), 305A.4 (WSA III/8: 326), 311.5 (WSA III/9: 73), 335D.2 (WSA III/9: 229), 351.11 (WSA III/10: 132); *en. Ps.* 69.2 (WSA III/17: 401), 137.14 (WSA III/20: 252); *ep. Io.* 4.4 (FC 92: 177).

⁵¹ Brown (2000b), 1-24.

⁵² s. 198.1 (WSA III/6: 73).

⁵³ For Monica, see *conf.* 6.2,2 (WSA I/1: 135-36).

⁵⁴ *ibid.* (136).

⁵⁵ s. 198.9 (WSA III/11: 87).

⁵⁶ s. 198.12 (WSA III/11: 189).

⁵⁷ For martyr festivals as alternative *spectacula* see Grig (2002), 34-53; Castelli (2004), 35-36.

occasional comments against those Christians who were tempted away from Church services to attend less holy forms of entertainment.⁵⁸ Augustine knew that the people who attended his sermons were the same people who attended the theatre: ‘those very crowds which fill the theatres on the festal days of the pagans also fill the churches on the festal days of Christians’.⁵⁹ While his audiences did not consider this to be problematic, he set the two in direct opposition.⁶⁰ So, for example, in a sermon on the festival of the Maccabean martyrs, he comments on the size of the crowd: ‘I see your numbers are very few... Do you have one forehead on which you received the sign of Christ, and another which you carry along to the theatre? Do you want to go [to the theatre]? Change your forehead, and get along there. So, as you cannot change your forehead, do not ruin it... the sign of Christ’s cross is sketched and fixed for you on your forehead’.⁶¹

Augustine did not just use rebukes and chastisements, but he also presented martyr festivals as superior forms of entertainment. So, in one sermon on the martyr Cyprian, he says: ‘the Church is offering your mind more honest and venerable spectacles. Just now the passion of the blessed Cyprian was being read. We were listening with our ears, observing it all with our minds; we could see him competing, somehow or other we felt afraid for him in his deadly peril, but we were hoping God would help him’.⁶² The festivals of the martyrs were to be sober occasions, celebrated with moderation and restraint, but they were also exciting sights for the eyes of the heart to feast upon.

Promoting the sombre celebration of martyr festivals was not just an attempt to increase Church attendance. Augustine had first-hand experience of the dangers of pagan entertainments. During his adolescence, his close friend Alypius had become addicted to the blood-lust of the gladiatorial shows.⁶³ Like Alypius, the person who chose to attend the theatre or the games had not made a simple choice of how to spend their time, but their decision could result in a mortal wound to their

⁵⁸ For example, *s.* 19.6 (WSA III/1: 385), 301A.8 (WSA III/8: 296-97).

⁵⁹ *cat. rud.* 25.48 (NPNF 3: 311).

⁶⁰ For Augustine and pagan *spectacula*, see Robert Markus, *The End of Ancient Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990, repr. 1993), 107-23.

⁶¹ *s.* 399A.8 (WSA III/8: 296-97).

⁶² *s.* 313A.3 (WSA III/9: 92).

⁶³ See *conf.* 6.8,13 (WSA I/1: 146-47).

soul.⁶⁴ Augustine describes a similar scene in his *On Teaching the Uninstructed* (*De catechizandis rudibus*), where he describes the avid frenzy of pagan spectacles:

The fiercer the fury with which they perceive these unhappy creatures [the athletes, actors, charioteers, hunters, and beasts] rage against each other, the better they like them, and the greater the enjoyment they have in them; and they favour them when thus excited, and by so favouring them they excite them all the more, the spectators themselves striving more madly with each other, as they espouse the cause of different combatants... How then can that mind which feeds on strife and contention keep the soundness of peace?⁶⁵

The theatre and the games arouse passionate emotions, incite a state of madness among the spectators, and bring about discord and division that does not only oppose the unity, peace, and concord of the Church, but also risks the salvation of the Christian spectator.

While Augustine's personal experience of attending *spectacula* led him to voice resolute attacks against them, those very experiences enabled him to identify and communicate with his listeners, as he too had delighted in the emotions that were roused by such entertainment.⁶⁶ And so, we find that he draws on his own experience to convert his listeners to the festivals of the martyrs. In his handbook *On Christian Teaching* (*De doctrina Christiana*), he explains that if a person admires an actor, they try to incite that same love in other people: 'The more passionate he is in his love, the more he tries by whatever methods he can to make his hero loved by a greater number of people, and the more he desires to point him out to a greater number of people. If he sees someone unenthusiastic he rouses him with his praises as much as he can'.⁶⁷ Likewise, when preaching on the martyrs, Augustine presents himself as an eager spectator. He is in love with the central characters – the martyrs – and he encourages his listeners to share his enthusiasm by following and supporting them. When doing this, he often adopts "the grand style" of speech, which he describes in *On Christian Teaching*:

A hearer must be delighted so that he can be gripped and made to listen, and moved so that he can be impelled to action. Your hearer is delighted if you

⁶⁴ *ibid.* (147): 'he opened his eyes, and suffered a more grievous wound in his soul than the gladiator he wished to see had received in the body'.

⁶⁵ *cat. rud.* 16.25 (NPNF 3: 300).

⁶⁶ See *conf.* 3.2,2 (WSA I/1: 76): 'I was held spellbound by theatrical shows full of images that mirrored my own wretched plight and further fuelled the fire within me'.

⁶⁷ *doc. Chr.* 1.29 (Green: 22).

speaking agreeably, and moved if he values what you promise, fears what you threaten, hates what you condemn, embraces what you commend, and rues the thing which you insist that he must regret, and if he rejoices at what you set forth in your preaching as something joyful, pities those whom by your words you present to his mind's eye as miserable, and shuns those whom with terrifying language you urge him to avoid.⁶⁸

In his sermons on the martyrs, Augustine tries to do just this. For example, in a sermon on the martyr Cyprian, he tries to move his listeners by helping them to distinguish between those things that they should love and imitate, and those that they should hate and avoid:

Do you want to know, in a word, what the difference is between our shows and spectacles and those of the theatres? We, to the extent that we are of sound and healthy mind, would love to imitate the martyrs whose contests we are watching... Decent spectator, when you are watching a show in the theatre, you are off your head if you have the audacity to imitate the performer you love... Acknowledge me as your friend, together with me change the shows you attend. Let us be crazy about the sort of performers whom we do not have to blush about; let us love the sort of performers whom we would choose to imitate, as far as we were able.⁶⁹

By placing himself on the same level as his listeners, Augustine encourages his audience to identify with him, to share in what he admires, loves, respects, hates, and shuns. He includes his listeners in his own desires ('We would love to imitate...'; 'Let us love...'), and he incorporates them into his own way of thinking by referring to the festivals of the martyrs as "our shows" (*spectacula nostra*). Here Augustine reveals his past career as a professor of rhetoric, as he tries to capture the attention of his audience and encourage them to change their ways by sharing his thoughts and his feelings.⁷⁰

Here Augustine's reflections on the martyrs are shaped by his attempt to correct his congregation's assumption that it is acceptable to attend both pagan and Christian festivals. Openly challenging this assumption, he presents martyrdom as a

⁶⁸ *ibid.* 4.12 (Green: 118).

⁶⁹ s. 313A.3 (WSA III/9: 92; MA I: 67-68): ...*Nos, quantum in nobis viget sana mens, martyres, quos spectamus, cupimus imitare... Agnosce amicum, spectacula muta mecum. Tales amemus, de quibus non erubescamus; tales amemus, quos imitari, quantum valemus, optemus.*

⁷⁰ Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967, new ed. 2000a), 248: 'This is the secret of Augustine's enormous power as a preacher. He will make it his first concern to place himself in the midst of his congregation, to appeal to their feelings for him, to react with immense sensitivity to their emotions, and so, as the sermon progressed, to sweep them up into his own way of feeling'.

counter-spectacle, which is not only superior to, but also incompatible with, participation in pagan *spectacula*.⁷¹ The feelings that are stirred up by the memory of martyrdom are not the hollow emotions that are roused by the ‘miserable delirium’ of the theatre, whose imaginary scenes capture and entice the viewer, and sweep them along in the ‘hideous flood of lust’.⁷² Martyr festivals and pagan *spectacula* are vastly different: ‘There the eyes are defiled, here the heart is purified; here spectators are to be praised, if they become imitators; while there the spectator is base, and the imitator infamous’.⁷³ Augustine’s attitude towards martyrdom is one of revision and reform, but not eradication.

Fashioning Popular Portraits

Augustine’s sermons reveal a sincere and personal devotion to the martyrs.⁷⁴ He did not promote the festivals merely to win the favour of the crowds, but his sermons were preached from the heart. We see this in a sermon on the martyrs Perpetua and Felicitas: ‘If what I can offer is quite unequal to the merits of these saints, I can still contribute my own enthusiastic feelings to the joy of this great feast’.⁷⁵ Often spontaneous, improvised, and delivered *ex tempore*, his sermons allow us to glimpse this devotion. Mirroring the festival atmosphere of celebration, they convey a palpable sense of triumph and victory. This is seen in one of his *Commentaries on the Psalms*, in which he reveals the joyful spirit that accompanied the festivals:

Dearly beloved brothers and sisters, call to mind a scene familiar to you. When some festival of the martyrs falls due, perhaps, and some holy place is named at which all are to assemble to celebrate the solemn rites, remember how the throngs incite one another, how people encourage each other, saying, “Come on, let’s go, let’s go!” Others ask, “Where are we going?” And they are told, “To that place, to the holy site.” People talk to each other and catch fire with enthusiasm, and all the separate flames unite into a single flame. This one flame that springs up from the conversation of many people who

⁷¹ Castelli (2004), 106.

⁷² *conf.* 3.2,3 (WSA I/1: 76).

⁷³ *s.* 301A.7 (WSA III/8: 295-96).

⁷⁴ Quasten (1940), 256: ‘[Augustine’s] strong efforts for an energetic reform of the martyr-cult prove his enthusiasm for a worthy veneration of the heroes of Christianity’. For a chronological review of Augustine’s views on martyrdom, see den Boeft (1989).

⁷⁵ *s.* 280.1 (WSA III/8: 72).

enkindle one another seizes them all and sweeps them along to the holy place.⁷⁶

The unusually large and diverse audiences that were drawn to the atmosphere of celebration presented Augustine with the opportunity to speak to a great number of people, including catechumens, the Christian faithful, and even non-Christians. Because of his mixed audiences, most often Augustine tried to ensure that his sermons were positive and optimistic. They focus on the availability of God's grace, the imitable examples of the martyrs, and the closeness and accessibility of eternal life.⁷⁷ In doing this, he follows the advice of Aristotle: 'Hearers pay most attention to things that are important, that concern their own interests, that are astonishing, that are agreeable; wherefore one should put the idea into their heads that the speech deals with such subjects'.⁷⁸ Augustine's listeners would have arrived with certain expectations concerning the content and tone of the sermons, and, to a certain extent, his role was to give them what they wanted to hear: 'what you are expecting from me today is to pronounce the praises of the apostles Peter and Paul, whose feast day it is. I acknowledge what you are expecting; and in acknowledging it, I give it'.⁷⁹

In his sermons, Augustine presents Christianity in its most positive light: as an appealing and rewarding religion, in which ordinary people could be valued as highly as the martyrs. His listeners are assured that they too could be like the martyrs: by ignoring those who taunt them on account of their faith,⁸⁰ by refusing to give false evidence in court,⁸¹ by suffering physical illness without reverting to superstitious remedies,⁸² or even by standing quietly and attentively throughout his long sermons.⁸³ Like the martyrs, they too could receive the reward of eternal life: 'you will always be crowned and depart from here as a martyr, if you overcome all

⁷⁶ *en. Ps.* 121.2 (WSA III/20: 14).

⁷⁷ Elena Martin, 'Timor Mortis: The Fear of Death in Augustine's Sermons on the Martyrs', in Peter Clarke and Tony Claydon (eds.), *The Church and the Afterlife*, SCH, 45 (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2009), 31-40. More generally, see J. Kevin Coyle, 'Adapted Discourse: Heaven in Augustine's *City of God* and in his Contemporary Preaching', *AugStud.* 30 (1999), 205-19.

⁷⁸ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, III.14.427, cited in Trevor Rowe, *St. Augustine: Pastoral Theologian* (London: Epworth, 1974), 31.

⁷⁹ *s.* 299.1 (WSA III/8: 229).

⁸⁰ *s.* 260E.2 (WSA III/7: 206-07).

⁸¹ *s.* 301A.5 (WSA III/8: 294), 306E.10 (WSA III/11: 279-80).

⁸² *s.* 4.36 (WSA III/1: 205-06), 286.7 (WSA III/9: 105), 335D.3 (WSA III/9: 229-231).

⁸³ *s.* 274 (WSA III/8: 24).

the temptations of the devil'.⁸⁴ In a sermon on the martyrs Protasius and Gervasius, he says that God 'does not grant health to everyone through the martyrs; but to all who imitate the martyrs, he does promise immortality'.⁸⁵

These optimistic messages would have been popular with his audiences. As van der Meer observes, Augustine's listeners would have hung on his words 'with such child-like excitement that a burst of joy filled the church when their beloved bishop spoke the words "eternal life"'.⁸⁶ Throughout his sermons on the martyrs, images of new life, rebirth, and resurrection reinforce the picture of life arising from death, beauty unfolding amidst suffering, and hope springing from despair: the martyrs burst into bloom with heavenly blossoms;⁸⁷ they drink from Christ's cup of suffering, which leads to new life;⁸⁸ their bodies, roasting on fires, are cooled and refreshed by the fountain of life;⁸⁹ their spilled blood is seed which grows in the church;⁹⁰ the miracles performed through their bodies bear witness to eternal life.⁹¹ Of course, many of these images had long been associated with the resurrection of the body.⁹²

A similar message of salvation is conveyed by Augustine's references to the reversal of history. These references combine the hope for eternal life with a longed-for sense of divine justice and retribution.⁹³ He describes how, in the past, the pagan persecutors had raged against the bodies of the martyrs to the screams and shouts of the impious onlookers, but now the martyrs are crowned in heaven as they look down

⁸⁴ s. 4.37 (WSA III/1: 306; PL 38: 0052): *semper coronaris, et martyr hinc exies, si omnes tentationes diaboli superaveris*.

⁸⁵ s. 286.5 (WSA III/8: 103; PL 38: 1299): *Non omnibus donat per martyres sanitatem: sed omnibus promittit imitatoribus martyrum immortalitatem*.

⁸⁶ van der Meer (1961), 432.

⁸⁷ s. 280.1 (WSA III/8: 72); *en. Ps.* 118(30) (WSA III/19: 486).

⁸⁸ s. 280.4 (WSA III/8: 74); *en. Ps.* 102.4 (WSA III/19: 81-82).

⁸⁹ s. 275.2 (WSA III/8: 27), 276.3 (WSA III/8: 30).

⁹⁰ For example, s. 275.2 (WSA III/8: 27), 280.6 (WSA III/8: 75), 305.1 (WSA III/8: 320), 313G.3 (WSA III/9: 124); *en. Ps.* 58(1).5 (WSA III/17: 151), 88.10 (WSA III/18: 281), 134.24 (WSA III/20: 212), 140.20-21 (WSA III/20: 321-22).

⁹¹ s. 275.3 (WSA III/8: 28), 286.5 (WSA III/8: 103).

⁹² Caroline Walker Bynum, *The Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), esp. 22-27.

⁹³ For example, s. 312.5 (WSA III/9: 83).

and pray for the multitude of Christians who sing praises to God.⁹⁴ Now the sound of the roaring crowd screaming with the lust for blood is replaced with the sound of congregations singing psalms in peace and harmony. Images of pagan judges seated on high while administering sentences to the martyrs are replaced with images of the martyrs seated at the right hand of God while looking down on the Christian community. Not only are the martyrs rewarded with eternal life, but God has also corrected, converted, and even redeemed those who had been enemies of the Church.⁹⁵ Those who were lost have been found; those who were still-born have been revived; those who had hoped to destroy the Christians are already being punished.⁹⁶ The very festivals at which Augustine preached are presented as testimony to the truth of the martyrs' witness.

Adaptation and Modification

Augustine's theology never was divorced from his preaching, but in his sermons he adapts and modifies his theological ideas in order to make them more obviously relevant for his congregations.⁹⁷ The rhetorical and pastoral nature and function of sermons enabled Augustine to communicate and promote the ethics, ideals, and beliefs of the Catholic Church.⁹⁸ So, when commenting on the martyrs in his sermons, he refers to past events to teach his audience how to live in the present. As Jackson comments: 'Discussion of martyrdom within the sermon became the means of fashioning an appropriate popular opinion on the new rôle of the martyr in the life of an empire free from overt persecution and in making this new-style martyr-cult an important interpretative key to the struggle at the heart of the everyday life of the Christian faithful'.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ *s.* 280.2 (WSA III/8: 72-73); *en. Ps.* 118(9).2 (WSA III/19: 379-80).

⁹⁵ Augustine uses the examples of Nebuchadnezzar and Antiochus to show how persecuting kings could either be converted or condemned by the messages of the martyrs: *s.* 286.6 (WSA III/8: 104), 301.2 (WSA III/8: 283), 343.2 (WSA III/10: 41).

⁹⁶ *en. Ps.* 59.15 (WSA III/17: 192), 62.20 (WSA III/17: 246), 118(9).2-3 (WSA III/19: 380), 118(31).2 (WSA III/13: 489), 137.14 (WSA III/20: 252).

⁹⁷ Coyle (1999); van der Meer (1961), 434; Rowe (1974), 32.

⁹⁸ For sermons in Late Antiquity, see Pauline Allen and Wendy Mayer, 'Computer and Homily: Accessing the Everyday Life of Early Christians', *VigChr.* 47 (1993), 260-80, at 260: 'it can be argued that in early Christianity the homily was the main bearer of culture and was fundamental to the transmission of norms in society'.

⁹⁹ M. G. St. A. Jackson, 'Martyrdom and Divine Intervention in St. Augustine', *SP*, 33 (1997), 105-13, at 105.

Augustine's depictions of the martyrs serve as a kind of commentary on history, in which the historical events of martyrdom are presented as being distant but close, and strange but familiar. The times might have changed, but the battle between good and evil will not end until the Final Judgement. Now the world is an olive press in which oil is mingled with dregs.¹⁰⁰ It is a threshing floor on which wheat is mixed with chaff.¹⁰¹ It is a painting in which vibrant hues are juxtaposed with shades of black.¹⁰² He explains that, even though they are living in *Christiana tempora*, it is always a time of persecution in this fallen existence: 'There is no lack of persecution. The devil is always the persecutor, and the chance to win a crown is never wanting. The only thing is that Christ's soldiers must understand the nature of the battle, and know whom they have to beat'.¹⁰³ Persecutors might not be prowling about like roaring lions, but they slither about like snakes that lie hidden and ready to attack.¹⁰⁴ Christians might not have to fear the sword or the gridiron, but they should be on their guard against the external attacks of heretics,¹⁰⁵ the assailment of pagan entertainments,¹⁰⁶ and the internal assaults of the passions.¹⁰⁷ The devil is always looking for new ways to tempt and seduce. Pagans, Jews, heretics, and even fellow Christians, can become diabolical instruments to test the good Christian.¹⁰⁸

But Augustine did not just promote spiritual martyrdom. The Sack of Rome by Alaric and the Goths, the Vandal invasions of Spain, Gaul, and (later) Africa, and the sporadic but vicious attacks of the Donatist *circumcelliones* were seen as physical persecutions that compared with, and continued, the earlier persecution of Christians.¹⁰⁹ Augustine's message to his listeners was that the present is not so different from the past. The world is one large arena in which ordinary Christians

¹⁰⁰ s. 19.6 (WSA III/1: 384), 23B.15 (WSA III/11: 45).

¹⁰¹ s. 311.10 (WSA III/9: 75); *en. Ps.* 25(2).5 (WSA III/15: 260-61).

¹⁰² s. 125.5 (WSA III/5: 256), 301.4 (WSA III/8: 285); *ep.* 29.11 (WSA II/1: 100).

¹⁰³ s. 4.36 (WSA III/1: 205). Cf. s. 335D.3, 5 (WSA III/9: 229-233).

¹⁰⁴ s. 305A.2, 5 (WSA III/8: 325, 327), 359B.14-15 (WSA III/11: 344-46); *en. Ps.* 69.2 (WSA III/17: 401), 90(2).9 (WSA III/18: 341).

¹⁰⁵ *en. Ps.* 9.9 (WSA III/15: 155), 90(2).9 (WSA III/18: 341), 141.9 (WSA III/20: 333-34); s. 283.6 (WSA III/11: 248).

¹⁰⁶ *en. Ps.* 69.2 (WSA III/17: 401).

¹⁰⁷ s. 335J.3 (WSA III/9: 253).

¹⁰⁸ *cat. rud.* 25.48 (NPNF 3: 310-11).

¹⁰⁹ For example, *ep.* 88.1,6,8 (WSA II/1: 351-52, 354, 356), 111 (WSA II/2: 88-94).

must be prepared to arm themselves with Christ so that they too can engage in the same battles that the martyrs had fought and won. He says: 'Even now those who are fighting against sin are engaged in a fight, and those who acknowledge it as a fight desire the winner's prize'.¹¹⁰

Beyond the Thoughts of the Flesh

By linking the past and the present with the notion of continued persecution, Augustine used the examples of the martyrs to address the cares and concerns of his listeners. As Daniel Doyle points out, in the *Commentaries on the Psalms*, 'the bishop's favourite themes were in direct response to the existential fears, hopes and joys of his listeners, emphasizing the precarious and transitory state of life in this world, where fortunes and health can be lost in a day'.¹¹¹ Certainly this is the case for the *Commentaries on the Psalms*: a series of sermons that displays a clear interest in the martyrs.¹¹² But it is also true of all his preaching on the martyrs. Whenever Augustine preached to an audience, he gave careful consideration to the thoughts and feelings of his listeners, and he adapted and modified his message to suit their needs.

This is not to say that his sermons contain weak or diluted versions of his theology. Paul Kolbet warns us against 'thinking of sermons as means of popularizing for the masses beliefs articulated more precisely in the treatises'.¹¹³ Likewise, Éric Rebillard explains that Augustine's preaching was not 'a mere adaptation of theology to a popular audience'.¹¹⁴ As Rebillard notes, preaching is not a one-way communication: 'The audience is not only a target in the act of preaching. The audience permanently gives some feed-back to the preacher'.¹¹⁵ Augustine's sermons on the martyrs should not be seen as the simplification of complex ideas for an uneducated and illiterate audience. Rather, his adaptation and modification is part of an interactive process in which he listens and responds to his listeners' wants and needs, fears and desires, anxieties and hopes.

¹¹⁰ s. 335J.1 (WSA III/9: 252).

¹¹¹ Doyle (2000), 88.

¹¹² See Bonnardière (1971), 73.

¹¹³ Paul R. Kolbet, 'Formal Continuities Between Augustine's Early Philosophical Teaching and Late Homiletical Practice', *SP*, 43 (2006), 149-54, at 150.

¹¹⁴ Éric Rebillard, 'Interaction between the Preacher and the Audience: The Case-Study of Augustine's Preaching on Death', *SP*, 31 (1997), 86-96, at 86.

¹¹⁵ Rebillard (1997), 96.

One example of this is found in his parallel reading of the story of the three boys in Nebuchadnezzar's fiery furnace (Dan. 3), with the story of the trial of the seven Maccabean brothers by Antiochus Epiphanes (2 Mac. 7:1-42; 4 Mac.).¹¹⁶ While the three boys had their prayer answered and were freed by divine intervention, the seven brothers suffered cruel and painful deaths. These stories, when seen together, provoke the following questions: Why did God intervene in the first case, but not in the second? Was God present among the three boys but absent from the seven?¹¹⁷ Were the three boys righteous and the seven boys sinful?¹¹⁸ Augustine's answer is that God was present in both cases. While only the three boys were saved openly (*aperte*) and visibly (*visibiliter*), the seven boys were saved secretly (*occulte*) and spiritually (*spiritualiter*).¹¹⁹ Only the three boys were given temporal salvation (*temporalis salus*), but both groups were given eternal salvation (*aeternus salus*).¹²⁰ This message would have been particularly relevant after the Sack of Rome in 410, as Augustine would have been preaching to those who were disillusioned or despairing after the destruction of a supposedly impregnable city.¹²¹ But this message is also in line with his constant concern to eradicate false expectations concerning the ability to obtain happiness in this life. His listeners' desire for temporal well-being and security is glimpsed in one of his sermons preached on the festival of the Maccabean martyrs: 'When you are told, "The felicity of the world is false", even though you dare not say so, I can still see it in your heart, you curl your lip perhaps, you sneer, you mock, and you say to yourself, "Oh, if only all was well with me here!"'.¹²²

Augustine uses the stories of the three boys and the seven boys to erase the 'earthy, dusty, smoky, steamy, fleshly, mortal thoughts' of his listeners.¹²³ He

¹¹⁶ Examples include *s.* 32.15 (WSA III/2: 144), 286.6 (WSA III/8: 104), 301.2 (WSA III/8: 282-83), 306E.9 (WSA III/11: 278-79); *en. Ps.* 36(3).9 (WSA III/16: 136-37), 137.14 (WSA III/20: 252-53); *ep. Io.* 8.7(2) (FC 92: 236-37). See further Jackson (1997), 107-110; den Boeft (1989), 120-22.

¹¹⁷ *en. Ps.* 36(3).9 (WSA III/16:137), 148.11 (WSA III/20: 487); *s.* 343.2 (WSA III/10: 41).

¹¹⁸ *s.* 301.2 (WSA III/8: 283).

¹¹⁹ *ep. Io.* 8.7(2) (FC 92: 237); *s.* 343.2 (WSA III/10: 41); *en. Ps.* 36(3).9 (WSA III/16: 137), 148.11 (WSA III/20: 487).

¹²⁰ *en. Ps.* 137.14 (WSA III/20: 253; PL 37: 1782).

¹²¹ *s.* 296 (WSA III/8: 203-13). See also Kaufman (1994), 2-6.

¹²² *s.* 301.3 (WSA III/8: 284).

¹²³ *ibid.*

encourages them to look at the two different types of martyrdom with the eyes of their hearts.¹²⁴ They should have ‘a Christian understanding’ (*Christiani intelligite*) of the matter.¹²⁵ They should look beyond the surface appearance of desolation and despair. So, in one of his *Commentaries on the Psalms*, he compares the two stories and draws out a moral lesson to reassure his listeners: ‘Whatever happens here [in this life] that is not to our liking, recognise that it happens only in accordance with God’s will, by his providence, as part of his design, by his permission, and in conformity with his laws’.¹²⁶ Although God heard the prayer of three boys in the furnace, not every prayer is answered in this life.¹²⁷ But, Augustine comforts his listeners that, while good people like the Maccabean brothers do suffer in this life, their suffering will be rewarded in the next life. Instead of focusing on this passing life, Christians must use the stories of the martyrs to redirect their hopes to eternal life: ‘let us pass on beyond the thoughts of the flesh, let us lift our hearts above, let us think about the life to come’.¹²⁸

Controlling the Fear of Death

Alleviating the disappointment and despair that arise from false expectations for temporal felicity was not a triviality. Augustine considered consolation to be a serious and urgent matter. He believed that disappointment and despair could lead people to fall away from faith, from the Church, and from salvation. So, in *On Teaching the Uninstructed*, he speaks about those people who ‘look for their felicity in this life’, and he explains that ‘when they see some wicked and impious men strongly established and excelling in this worldly prosperity, while they themselves either possess it in a smaller degree or miss it altogether, they are troubled with the thought that they are serving God without reason, and so they readily fall away from the faith’.¹²⁹ In his sermons, Augustine appeals to the martyrs to address this problem. He urges his listeners to imitate the martyrs not by hoping for security in

¹²⁴ s. 286.6 (WSA III/8: 104).

¹²⁵ s. 301.2 (WSA III/8: 283; PL 38: 1381).

¹²⁶ *en. Ps.* 148.11-12 (WSA III/20: 487).

¹²⁷ s. 286.6 (WSA III/8: 104); *en. Ps.* 33(2).22 (WSA III/16: 40).

¹²⁸ s. 301.7 (WSA III/8: 286). See further Theodore S. De Bruyn, ‘Ambivalence within a “Totalizing Discourse”’: Augustine’s Sermons on the Sack of Rome’, *JECS*, 1 (1993), 405-21, esp. 413; den Boeft (1989), 122.

¹²⁹ *cat. rud.* 17.26 (NPNF 3: 301).

this life, but by hoping for eternal security in the life after death: ‘Make light of health, you will have immortality; make light of death, you will have life; make light of honour, you will have a crown; make light of the friendship of man, you will have the friendship of God. But there, where you have God as your friend, you will not be without the friendship of a neighbour; there as your friends these martyrs will be with you’.¹³⁰

Augustine’s sermons allow us to see that one of the most frequent causes of despair among his congregations was the fear of death. His references to *timor mortis* reflect the persistent anxieties of his congregations concerning their own mortality. In one sermon on the subject of Christian discipline, he allows us to see just how powerful the fear of death was: ‘How it disturbs us, this dread of death, how it interrupts and upsets our thoughts! How the very word, when I mentioned it, struck at your hearts! Your groans and sighs testified to your fear, and made it clear enough. I heard, yes, I heard. You sighed and groaned; you are afraid of death’.¹³¹ In another sermon, he says: ‘How filled with dread of dying people are, though bound to die anyway! You can see people tremble, take to their heels, look for hiding places, snatch at last-ditch defences, beg, prostrate themselves; if it were possible, give whatever they have to be granted their lives, to live one day more, to extend just a little longer a life that is always uncertain’.¹³²

Augustine’s reflections on the fear of death broke away from Cyprian before him, who had associated the fear of death with a spiritual weakness derived from a lack of faith.¹³³ A similar line was taken by Ambrose, who interpreted the fear of death as a moral failing that is felt only by those with a guilty conscience and those who are foolish (*insipientes*).¹³⁴ Ambrose had proclaimed: ‘if death is considered frightening among the living, it is not death itself that is frightening, but conjecture

¹³⁰ s. 299D.6 (WSA III/8: 260).

¹³¹ s. 399.12 (WSA III/10: 466).

¹³² s. 302.4-5 (WSA III/8: 302-03).

¹³³ Cyprian, *On the Mortality*, 14 (ANCL 8: 460-61): ‘What a grandeur of spirit it is to struggle with all the powers of an unshaken mind against so many onsets of devastation and death!... Assuredly, he may fear to die, who, not being regenerated of water and the Spirit, is delivered over to the fires of Gehenna; he may fear to die who is not enrolled in the cross and passion of Christ’.

¹³⁴ Ambrose, *On Death as a Good*, 8.31 (FC 65: 93): ‘For we do not have anything to fear in death if in our life we have done nothing to be afraid of’. Cf. *ibid.* 8.32 (94): ‘the foolish are afraid of death’.

(*opinio*) about death'.¹³⁵ But Augustine directly opposed him by asserting that 'the horror of death is a matter of nature, not a matter of opinion (*non opinio, sed natura*)'.¹³⁶ Augustine developed his views on the fear of death during his encounter with Pelagianism. With the authoritative and orthodox precedents of Cyprian and Ambrose, Pelagius presented the fear of death as a moral failing. He used the example of Paul to illustrate how the fear of death can, and, therefore, should, be overcome.¹³⁷ Augustine, on the contrary, saw the fear of death as an unavoidable part of fallen nature, and he used the example of the apostle Peter to illustrate this.¹³⁸ For Augustine, no human being could ever be completely free from the fear of death. Only Christ was free from the fear of death, because he alone was without sin.¹³⁹ The Pelagian notion of *impeccantia*, and the belief that the first human beings were created mortal, led Augustine to expound the serious and lasting effects of Adam's sin, including the permanent fear of death.¹⁴⁰

Indeed, Augustine himself had felt the fear of death. In his *Soliloquies* (*Soliloquia*), written in 386/7, he confesses: 'At present, however, I think that I can be disturbed by only three things: the fear of losing those whom I love, the fear of pain, and the fear of death'.¹⁴¹ A more emotional and memorable portrait is painted in his *Confessions*, where he recalls the pain, confusion, and fear that he felt after the loss of one of his closest friends: 'I had become a great enigma to myself... although my weariness with living was intense, so too was my fear of dying. I believe that the more I loved him, the more I hated death, which had taken him from me; I hated it as a hideous enemy, and feared it, and pictured it as ready to devour all human

¹³⁵ *ibid.* 8.31 (FC 65: 93).

¹³⁶ Augustine, *s.* 172.1 (WSA III/5: 251; PL 38: 0936). Éric Rebillard compares these two quotations from Ambrose and Augustine. See Éric Rebillard, *In Hora Mortis: Évolution de la Pastorale Chrétienne de la mort aux IVe et Ve Siècles*, Bibliothèque des Écoles Françaises D'Athènes et de Rome, vol. 283 (Paris; Rome: École Française de Rome, 1994), 9.

¹³⁷ Robert Dodaro, "'Christus Iustus' and Fear of Death in Augustine's Dispute with Pelagius", in Zumkeller (ed.), *Signum Pietatis: Festgabe für Cornelius Petrus Mayer OSA zum 60. Geburtstag* (Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag, 1989), 341-61, esp. 345.

¹³⁸ *s.* 299.8 (WSA III/8: 235). Augustine concludes that both Peter and Paul were both willing and unwilling to die (*volens Paulus et volens Petrus, et nolens Paulus et nolens Petrus*). See *s.* 299.9 (WSA III/8: 236) for the explanation that Paul did not delight in death, but patiently endured it.

¹³⁹ Dodaro (1989), 343-44, 347.

¹⁴⁰ For Adam's sin, see *s.* 299.8 (WSA III/8: 235-36). For the creation of mortal human beings, see *s.* 299.11 (WSA III/8: 238). See further Rebillard (1997).

¹⁴¹ *sol.* 1.9.16 (FC 5: 363).

beings'.¹⁴² These feelings and experiences enabled him to identify with the emotions of his audiences.

In response to the anxiety of his congregations, Augustine adopted a rather more sympathetic stance than Cyprian, Ambrose, or Pelagius, as he helped his listeners to gain perspective on the fear of death. Alluding to Matthew 10:28 ('Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell'), he tells his listeners that they cannot avoid the death of the body, but they can avoid the death of the soul by trying not to sin.¹⁴³ Occasionally, his words can sound so blunt that we might imagine his listeners trembling with fear before him: 'You were born a human being; you are going to die (*natus es homo, moriturus es*)'.¹⁴⁴ But Augustine's aim was not to incite fear. Rather, he aimed to show that there is a right order of fear: 'Be afraid of the second death', he says, 'where the soul is not wrenched from the flesh, but the soul is tormented with the flesh. Do not be afraid of the transitory death, be afraid of the permanent one; there is no worse death than where death does not die'.¹⁴⁵ He redirects his listeners' fear away from physical death and towards eternal death to encourage them to make progress in this life in spite of the inevitability of the death of the body. He assures those people who pray for a good, painless death that 'it is impossible to die a bad death, if you have lived a good life'.¹⁴⁶ While the cup of death tastes bitter, it is only by drinking from this cup that Christians can pass to a glorious sweetness.¹⁴⁷ His message is consolatory and encouraging. It is the perceptive advice of a pastor who does not want to receive eternal life without his flock: 'What do I live for, if not with this intention that we should all live together with Christ? That is my desire, that is my honour, that is my most treasured possession... I do not want to be saved without you'.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴² *conf.* 4.4,9, 4.6,11 (WSA I/1: 97, 99). See also *conf.* 9.12,29-33 (WSA I/1: 231-33) for Augustine's grief after Monica's death.

¹⁴³ *s.* 399.12,13 (WSA III/10: 466). See also *s.* 279.9 (WSA III/8: 64-65).

¹⁴⁴ *Io. ev. tr.* 43.12(2) (FC 88: 28; PL 35: 1710).

¹⁴⁵ *s.* 335B.5 (WSA III/9: 219). See also *civ. Dei*, 13.2 (Dyson: 541); *s.* 65.8 (WSA III/3: 196): 'The death of the body is everlasting punishment; the death of the soul is the absence of God'.

¹⁴⁶ *s.* 399.13 (WSA III/10: 466).

¹⁴⁷ See *s.* 299A.2 (WSA III/8: 243), 299E.2 (WSA III/8: 264). See also *civ. Dei*, 13.4 (Dyson: 545).

¹⁴⁸ *s.* 17.2 (WSA III/1: 367).

For those people who still are not consoled by his words, Augustine offers the example of the martyrs. He explains that the martyrs seem to have died bad deaths: ‘Some were killed at a single stroke of the sword, others by fire, others by wild animals’.¹⁴⁹ Those who do not believe in an afterlife look on with the eyes of the flesh and they think that the martyr has been defeated and has suffered a bad death.¹⁵⁰ But Christians look on with the eyes of faith, and, with the illumination of the light of faith, they perceive hidden sights and concealed truths that others are not permitted to see: the martyrs lay down their bodies but their souls do not die.¹⁵¹ He prompts his listeners: ‘Inquire about the deaths of the martyrs. Question the eyes in your head: they died a bad death. Question the eyes of faith: *Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his saints* (Ps. 116:15)’.¹⁵² So, for example, he comments on the female martyr Crispina: ‘Wretched onlookers deemed her wretched, yet she was rejoicing in the sight of angels’.¹⁵³ In another sermon on the martyrs, he alludes to Psalm 126 (‘those who sow in tears will reap in joy’) to explain that temporal sorrows reap eternal rewards: ‘not even those who have sown in tears need despair, because even if they have sown in tears, the pain and the sighing will pass away. Sadness passes at the end, and gladness comes without end’.¹⁵⁴ Here Augustine addresses his listeners’ fear of death by presenting the martyrs as witnesses to eternal life. He urges his listeners to perceive the martyrs – and themselves – with the eyes of faith: ‘Believe what you cannot yet see, so that you may earn the right to see what you believe’.¹⁵⁵ The martyrs are powerful illustrations of the consolatory message: ‘when you die, you will not be dead’.¹⁵⁶

Augustine also responds to his congregations’ fear of death by explaining that the martyrs too were afraid of death,¹⁵⁷ but they were able to endure hard trials

¹⁴⁹ *en. Ps.* 148.11 (WSA III/20: 486-87).

¹⁵⁰ *s.* 299E.2 (WSA III/8: 264), 335E.2 (WSA III/9: 234).

¹⁵¹ *en. Ps.* 40.2 (WSA III/16: 227).

¹⁵² *s.* 399.13 (WSA III/10: 467). See also *s.* 329.2 (WSA III/9: 183).

¹⁵³ *en. Ps.* 137.3 (WSA III/20: 243).

¹⁵⁴ *s.* 31.3 (WSA III/2: 132).

¹⁵⁵ *s.* 301.9 (WSA III/8: 287-88).

¹⁵⁶ *en. Ps.* 36(3).15 (WSA III/16:141).

¹⁵⁷ For example, *s.* 159A.3 (WSA III/11: 136), 277.2 (WSA III/8: 34), 297.1-3 (WSA III/8: 216-17), 299.8 (WSA III/8:235-36), 330.4 (WSA III/9: 188), 335B.3 (WSA III/9: 217), 335C.1 (WSA III/9: 221).

because the love of God was shed abroad in their hearts by the Holy Spirit.¹⁵⁸ With the help of the Spirit, the martyrs were able to follow the example of Christ, who, in the garden of Gethsemane, transposed human weakness to himself, and said: ‘my soul is sorrowful to death’.¹⁵⁹ Here Augustine breaks away from traditional depictions of the martyrs. His martyrs do not publicly proclaim their contempt of death, skip happily towards the arena, or sing joyfully while watching the executioners tear at their bodies. His martyrs are not valiant and virile, they do not want to suffer and die, and they are not eager to give up their lives. He tells his listeners that, yes, they are martyrs, but still they were human beings: *martyres sunt, sed homines fuerunt*.¹⁶⁰ They were born like us, they were made of human flesh, they had to live with the consequences of original sin, and they were subjected to death.¹⁶¹ Despite their virtuous actions, the martyrs were not sinless. Despite their ultimate sacrifice, the deaths of the martyrs were not salvific. Augustine’s martyrs are profoundly human. They are weak people who are made strong by the grace of God. Their fear of death was not a spiritual weakness or moral failing, but it even added to their glory: ‘For if there were no distress of death, or a slight one, the glory of the martyrs would not be so great’.¹⁶²

Augustine’s martyrs showed that the fear of death was acceptable, natural, and, indeed, unavoidable. But, with the grace of God, fear could be controlled. By presenting the martyrs on the same level as his listeners, Augustine made the martyrs’ exemplary actions not only awesome and admirable, but also accessible and attainable. The martyrs inspire wonder because God’s grace is seen at work in them. But there is no fundamental difference between the martyrs and other Christian men or women. Anyone can achieve what the martyrs achieved, if they have help from God.

This presentation of the martyrs results, in part, from Augustine’s theological anthropology. The martyrs are part of fallen creation, and so are subject to death. As

¹⁵⁸ For example, *s.* 274 (WSA III/8: 23-24), 276.1-3 (WSA III/8: 29-31), 280.4 (WSA III/8: 74), 284.3 (WSA III/8: 88-89), 299A.1 (WSA III/8: 241), 299F.4 (WSA III/8: 273-74), 305A.2 (WSA III/8: 325), 335B.4 (WSA III/9: 218), 335H.2 (WSA III/9: 247).

¹⁵⁹ *s.* 31.3 (WSA III/2: 132), 305.4 (WSA III/8: 322). The biblical text is Mt. 26:38.

¹⁶⁰ *s.* 335H.2 (WSA III/9: 247). See also 305A.2 (WSA III/8: 325).

¹⁶¹ *s.* 273.9 (WSA III/8: 21), 299F.3 (WSA III/8: 273).

¹⁶² *Io. ev. tr.* 123.5 (FC 92: 80). See also *s.* 299.8 (WSA III/8: 235), 335B.3 (WSA III/9: 217), 335C.1 (WSA III/9: 221).

a punishment for Adam's sin, death can never be praised as a good in and of itself.¹⁶³ The martyr's sacrifice is never anything more than the repayment of a debt: the martyr gives back the gift of life to God. Furthermore, this repayment is itself a gift from God, which is effected through divine help in the form of the external example of Christ and the inner working of the Holy Spirit.¹⁶⁴

But this depiction of the martyrs also arises from Augustine's perceptive response to the widespread fears and anxieties of his listening audiences. He saw that his congregations needed regular human beings with whom they could identify: people who felt the same fears of pain and death, who were tempted by the sweetness of life, and who experienced the interior battles of the passions, but had overcome all these trials. He reminded his congregations that they were all members of the same body, that the small have been blessed with the great, and that the reward already enjoyed by the martyrs is, in a sense, already enjoyed by the Church body as a whole.¹⁶⁵ Here Augustine uses the figures of the martyrs to deliver a consolatory, encouraging, and inspiring message to give confidence to his congregations.

Textual Representations

It should not surprise us that Augustine's written reflections on the martyrs differ from those in his sermons. The oral nature of sermons, combined with the occasion of martyr festivals, inevitably led Augustine to portray the martyrs in different ways in his writing and his preaching. Unlike his sermons, his writings are not situated in a liturgical or festal context, but rather they relate to more specific polemical, moral, and theological concerns. His written reflections on the martyrs include discussions of the martyrs as intercessors and guardians;¹⁶⁶ reflections on Christology;¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ However, the martyrs made good use of a bad thing: *Trin.* 13.16,20 (WSA I/5: 359); *civ. Dei*, 13.5 (Dyson: 546-47).

¹⁶⁴ s. 299.3 (WSA III/8: 230).

¹⁶⁵ s. 280.6 (WSA III/8: 75).

¹⁶⁶ *cura. mort.* (FC 27: 351-84).

¹⁶⁷ *agon.* 23(25) (FC 2: 340-41): 'We must not on this account deny that the Word of the Father was born and suffered for us – he who is the only-begotten Son of God, through whom all things were made. For we assert that the martyrs also suffered and died for the sake of the kingdom of heaven; yet their souls were not destroyed in this suffering and death... Therefore, just as we affirm that the martyrs endured suffering and death in the bodies they carried about, without suffering destruction or death to their souls, so we declare that the Son of God underwent suffering and death in the human nature He bore, without undergoing any change or death in His Divinity'.

discussions of posthumous salvation for the unbaptised;¹⁶⁸ debates on the nature of the soul;¹⁶⁹ illustrations of divine providence;¹⁷⁰ explanations of the growth of the Church;¹⁷¹ reflections on miracles performed by the relics, or at the shrines, of the martyrs;¹⁷² investigations on the subject of the resurrected body.¹⁷³ While many of these ideas are also present in his sermons, they tend to be treated more explicitly in his writings. The big questions are brought to the foreground, while the individual martyrs and their personal experiences are pushed to one side, only to be called upon as examples and illustrations.

One example of this is found in *On the Care to be Taken for the Dead* (*De cura pro mortuis gerenda*), which Augustine wrote between the years 420 and 422, in response to a letter that he had received from Paulinus of Nola.¹⁷⁴ A widow, named Flora, had asked Paulinus for permission to bury her son at the shrine of the martyr-saint, Felix. Paulinus had agreed to the request, but he was concerned to hear Augustine's opinions on the matter: can it benefit a person if, after their death, their body is buried near to the grave of a saint?¹⁷⁵

Paulinus's letter prompted Augustine to reflect on the practice of burial *ad sanctos*, the traditional funerary customs performed for the care of the dead, and the continued relationship between the saints, the Christian community, and the salvation of the departed. In his reply, Augustine appealed to 2 Corinthians 5:10 to remind Paulinus that each Christian will be judged according to what they have done *in the*

¹⁶⁸ *an. et or.* 1.10,12-1.11,13, 2.10,14, 3.9,12 (WSA I/23: 479-80, 506, 522-23).

¹⁶⁹ *an. et or.* 4.18,26-27 (WSA I/23: 550-52).

¹⁷⁰ *util. cred.* 17(35) (FC 4: 439-40): 'This [performance of virtue] is the work of Divine Providence, achieved through the prophecies of the prophets, through the humanity and teaching of Christ, through the journeys of the apostles, through the sufferings, the crosses, the blood and the death of the martyrs, through the admirable lives of the saints, and in all these, at opportune times, through miracles worthy of such great deeds and virtues'.

¹⁷¹ *civ. Dei*, 18.50 (Dyson: 897-88); *f. invis.* 7,10 (FC 4: 468): 'Accordingly, the faithful have been struggling, even to the death, for the sake of the truth, not by returning evil for evil, but by bearing evil patiently; they have been the victors, not by killing, but by dying. In such a way, then, has the world been changed to this religion; thus have the hearts of all been converted, men and women, young and old, learned and ignorant, wise and simple, mighty and weak, rich and poor, renowned and lowly'.

¹⁷² *civ. Dei*, 22.8-10 (Dyson: 1120-21, 1126-36); *conf.* 9.7,16 (WSA I/1: 221).

¹⁷³ *civ. Dei*, 22.19-20 (Dyson: 1149-50).

¹⁷⁴ *cura. mort.* (FC 27: 351-84).

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.* 1(1) (351-52). Burial *ad sanctos* was popular in North Africa. We might think of the large cemeteries and popular pilgrimage sites at the shrines of the female martyrs Crispina (at Tebessa) and Salsa (at Tipasa).

body, not according to what has been done *to* the body after death.¹⁷⁶ The burial of a corpse at a saint's memorial does not benefit the departed, except in circumstances where the location of the corpse will inspire more ardent prayers from the family of the deceased.¹⁷⁷ Yet, even then, prayers for the departed are not beneficial to those who have lived immoral lives.¹⁷⁸

It is in relation to this matter that Augustine appeals to the example of the martyrs of Lyons. The account of their martyrdom was included in Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*, which was translated into Latin by Rufinus at the end of the fourth century.¹⁷⁹ The original narrative is in the form of a letter, which relates how a group of Christian men and women – including Sanctus, Blandina, Pothinus, Maturus, Attalus, and Biblis – endured various tortures and suffered cruel deaths before their corpses were violated and destroyed. In his response to Paulinus, Augustine refers to the martyrdom account: the martyrs' corpses were exposed to dogs, they were set on fire, and the ashes were swept into the river, so that 'nothing at all might remain to be remembered'.¹⁸⁰ These martyrs bear witness to the fact that neither the failure to bury a corpse, nor any attempt to destroy it, is an obstacle to salvation.¹⁸¹ In this context, the individual experiences of each of the martyrs are not relevant. Augustine omits the names of the martyrs, and he does not refer to the personal experiences of the individuals in the group. He is not concerned with the martyrs *per se*, but with showing how 'all these things – the care of the funeral arrangements, the establishment of the place of burial, the pomp of the ceremonies – are more of a solace for the living than an aid for the dead'.¹⁸² Here the martyrs are not the focus of the letter, but rather they are illustrations and visual aids.

Likewise, in the *City of God* (*De civitate Dei*), Augustine appeals to the collective example of "the martyrs" to explain their role in God's salvific activity in Christian history:

¹⁷⁶ *cura. mort.* 1(2) (FC 27: 352).

¹⁷⁷ *ibid.* 2(3) (353-56). For prayers for the departed see 4(6) (FC 27: 358-59).

¹⁷⁸ For the inefficacy of prayer for the reprobate, see *civ. Dei*, 21.24 (Dyson: 1086).

¹⁷⁹ *cura. mort.* 6(8) (FC 27: 361).

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.* 6(8) (361).

¹⁸¹ *ibid.* 8(10) (365).

¹⁸² *ibid.* 2(4) (355).

The Gospel was preached throughout the whole world, not only by those who had seen and heard Christ both before His passion and after His resurrection, but also, after their death, by their successors, in the midst of terrible persecutions and many tortures and the deaths of the martyrs. And God bore witness by signs and manifestations and diverse acts of power, and by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, so that the peoples of the Gentiles, believing in Him Who was crucified for their redemption, might venerate with Christian love the blood of the martyrs which they had shed in their devilish fury.¹⁸³

In this overarching scheme, the names and experiences of individual martyrs are not important. The message of the martyrs is conveyed by an artificial categorisation of “the martyrs” as one, homogeneous group: an ‘innumerable multitude’, united by a collective identity as witnesses to the same truth, and motivated by the same desire to love and proclaim that truth.¹⁸⁴ In the *City of God*, most of Augustine’s martyrs remain without names or faces, even when they are contrasted with Roman heroes, whose names, identities, and experiences are recalled with greater detail.¹⁸⁵ Sometimes Augustine appeals to “the martyrs” in polemical fashion by describing them as superior to Roman heroes.¹⁸⁶ At other times he appeals to them in an apologetic manner by explaining that Christians honour the martyrs but they do not worship them as gods or idols.¹⁸⁷ And in other places he recalls the miracles and exorcisms that have been brought about by the martyrs’ prayers or relics, as he interprets these as divine revelations and proofs of eternal life.¹⁸⁸

As a group, the martyrs personify the City of God, which is bound together with the love of God and the desire for eternal happiness in the future life. The martyrs reflect the communal identity and selfless love that distinguishes the heavenly city, whereas Adam and Eve represent the self-centredness and pride of the earthly city. The martyrs recapitulate their first parents. While Eve was seduced into

¹⁸³ *civ. Dei*, 18.50 (Dyson: 897-98).

¹⁸⁴ For the ‘innumerable multitude’, see *civ. Dei*, 5.14 (Dyson: 215). Another example is that of the Maccabees; while Augustine describes their martyrdom in greater detail in his sermons, he does not do this in the *City of God*. See *civ. Dei*, 18.36 (Dyson: 874): the ‘fierce and wondrous sufferings of certain of the martyrs (*quorundam martyrum*) who... stood fast even in the face of the most grievous and horrible afflictions’.

¹⁸⁵ For Augustine’s curt allusions to the experiences of the martyrs, in comparison with his more detailed accounts of Gaius Mucius Scaevola, Marcus Curtius, the Decii, and Marcus Regulus, see *civ. Dei*, 5.18 (Dyson: 220-22).

¹⁸⁶ *civ. Dei*, 5.14, 5.18, 10.21 (Dyson: 215, 220-22, 423).

¹⁸⁷ *civ. Dei*, 8.26-27, 22.10 (Dyson: 354-58, 1135-36).

¹⁸⁸ *civ. Dei*, 8.26, 22.8-9 (Dyson: 356, 1120-35).

valuing creation over the Creator, the martyrs knew the right order of creation. While Adam transgressed God's command and brought death to the whole of the human race, the martyrs obeyed God's commandments and, by dying, they received eternal life:

For formerly it was said to the man, 'If you sin, you will die'. Now, however, it is said to the martyr, 'Die, so that you will not sin'. Formerly it was said, 'if you transgress the commandments, you shall die the death'; but now it is said, 'if you refuse death, you will transgress the commandment'... Thus, by the ineffable mercy of God, the very punishment of wickedness has itself become the armour of virtue, and the penalty of the sinner is made the reward of the righteous.¹⁸⁹

The suffering of the martyrs is an example of God's mercy: 'God has granted so great a grace to faith that death, which is acknowledged to be the opposite of life, has become the means through which we may pass over into life'.¹⁹⁰

While the martyrs are important figures in the *City of God*, the grand scheme of the work keeps the individual identities of the martyrs in the shadows. What matters is not their earthly status as human beings who lived and died in particular times and places, but their a-temporal significance, as members of the City of God, who bear witness to eternal truths: 'For the martyrs themselves were martyrs – that is, witnesses – to the faith'.¹⁹¹

Defending the Cult of the Martyrs

A similar observation can be made for Augustine's letters. Around the year 390, Augustine received a letter from a pagan grammarian from Madaura, named Maximus. In his letter, Maximus ridicules Christians for venerating the martyrs, not least because of their Punic names, which suggest their low social status:

Who, after all, would tolerate that Mygdo should be preferred to Jupiter brandishing his thunderbolts or that Sanaes and the martyr of martyrs, Namphano, should be preferred to Juno, to Minerva, to Venus, to Vesta – and horror! – to all the immortal gods? Among them Lucitas is honoured with

¹⁸⁹ *civ. Dei*, 8.4 (Dyson: 545). For an explicit comparison of Adam and the martyrs, see *corrept.* 35 (WSA I/23: 133).

¹⁹⁰ *civ. Dei*, 8.4 (Dyson: 545-46).

¹⁹¹ *ibid.* 22.9 (1134).

scarcely less worship, as well as others to an indefinite number – names hateful to the gods and to men!¹⁹²

Augustine replies to Maximus: ‘as an African writing to Africans, for we are both living in Africa, you could not forget yourself to such an extent that you thought that Punic names should be criticized... You should, of course, regret that you were born in the place where the cradle of that tongue is still warm’.¹⁹³ Casting aside the insinuation that the cult of the martyrs revered men of a low social class, Augustine urges Maximus to take note of his own religion, in which ridiculous gods are worshipped: ‘If, nonetheless, you want to laugh, you have lots of material for laughing at your own religion: a god of manuring, a god of the toilet, bald Venus, the god Fear, the god Pallor, the goddess Fever, and countless others of this sort’.¹⁹⁴

Augustine did not consider this the place to discuss the moral and theological value of the martyrs, or to defend the particular martyrs that Maximus had ridiculed. Throughout the letter he tentatively questions Maximus’s motives. In his opening sentence he asks: ‘Are we carrying on a serious conversation, or do you want to joke?’¹⁹⁵ But, despite this tentative tone, Augustine does include a serious note of explanation at the end of the letter: ‘in order that this point may not escape your notice and unwisely lead you to sacrilegious charges, you should know that Catholic Christians, who also have a church in your town, do not worship any of the dead, and adore nothing as a god that has been created and established by God, but adore the one God himself, who has created and established all things’.¹⁹⁶

While Maximus’s letter might not have been a serious attack, Augustine did have to defend the cult of the martyrs from more exacting criticism. Several years later, in 397-99, Augustine wrote his treatise *Against Faustus the Manichee* (*Contra*

¹⁹² *ep.* 16.2 (WSA II/1: 46). For the martyrs listed here, see further J. H. Baxter, ‘The Martyrs of Madaura, A.D. 180’, *JTS*, 26 (1924), 21-37. Baxter concludes that the martyrs were *circumcelliones* (31), but his argument is not convincing. On another note, it is particularly interesting for our present study that, of the four martyrs that Maximus mentions, one of these – Sanaes – is a female martyr. Moreover, in the Latin original, the comparisons of the martyrs and the gods are sexually consonant: Mydgo is compared to a male god, Naphano is compared to all the gods, but Sanaes is compared to goddesses: (PL 33: 0082): *Quis enim ferat Jovi fulmina vibranti praeferri Mygdonem; Junoni, Minervae, Veneri, Vestaeque Sanaem, et cunctis, pro nefas! diis immortalibus archimartyrem Namphonionem?*

¹⁹³ *ep.* 17.2 (WSA II/1: 49).

¹⁹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ *ibid.* 17.1 (48).

¹⁹⁶ *ibid.* 17.5 (50).

Faustum Manicheum). This text is a valuable source that allows us to see some of the criticisms that were levelled against the North African cult of the martyrs.¹⁹⁷ According to this text, Faustus had claimed that the martyrs were treated like idols that were placated with food and drink. Also, he criticised Christians who became drunk and acted immorally at the martyrs' graves. Interestingly, these are the same criticisms that Augustine himself had raised in his correspondence with Aurelius, the Bishop of Carthage (in 391), and with Alypius, his close friend and the Bishop of Thagaste (in 395).¹⁹⁸ But here, in response to Faustus, Augustine adopts a rather more defensive, and somewhat idealistic, tone, as he explains how the faithful honour the martyrs: 'The Christian people, however, celebrate the memorials of the martyrs with religious solemnity both in order to encourage the imitation of them and in order to be united with their merits and helped by their prayers'.¹⁹⁹ Augustine insists that, even if some people do become drunk at the shrines, this is a much smaller sin than offering sacrifice to the martyrs.²⁰⁰ In fact, celebrations at the graves of the martyrs have a strong moral benefit because the holy places encourage fervent prayer and inspire imitation.²⁰¹ Here, as with most of his writings, Augustine is less concerned with describing the martyrs, and more concerned with defining and defending the cult of the martyrs.

True and False Martyrs

The main difference that we can draw between Augustine's preaching and writing on the martyrs is that his sermons present more detailed reflections on the martyrs, whereas his writings are more concerned with martyrdom and the cult of the martyrs.²⁰² But, while this difference remains, it would be inaccurate to overstate the distinction. Similar ideas, concerns, beliefs, and intentions are evident in both. One of the best examples of this is the anti-Donatist polemic that permeates so many of his sermons and writings.

¹⁹⁷ *c. Faust.* 20.21 (WSA I/20: 278-280).

¹⁹⁸ *ep.* 22 (WSA II/2: 58-82), 29 (WSA II/2: 95-100).

¹⁹⁹ *c. Faust.* (WSA I/20: 279).

²⁰⁰ *ibid.* (280).

²⁰¹ *ibid.*

²⁰² We explore Augustine's depictions of the martyrs in greater detail in Chapter Two, below.

The Donatist Church claimed to be the Church of the Martyrs.²⁰³ It perceived itself as the true African Church, in which the spirit of the martyrs was kept alive. For the Donatists, persecution did not end in the year 312; the true Church continued to be persecuted by the Roman authorities and the Catholic Church.²⁰⁴ It was still a time of making martyrs. The centrality of martyrdom for Donatist identity is most clear in the extreme example of the fanatical *circumcelliones*, who voluntarily took their own lives in order to be venerated as martyrs. Optatus and Augustine would have us believe that the actions of the *circumcelliones* are typical of all Donatists, but, as Alan Dearn has shown, the association between Donatism and voluntary martyrdom is largely a polemical construct.²⁰⁵ And yet, martyrdom was a defining feature of Donatist identity at large. As J. Kevin Coyle explains: ‘Devotion to the martyrs and adherence to the bible were hallmarks of North African Christianity, both Catholic and Donatist. But Donatists carried these distinguishing marks to the point of holding up death by martyrdom as the biblical ideal to which every true Christian should aspire’.²⁰⁶

The Donatist edition of the *Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs* illustrates the Donatist claim to preserve the martyr spirit and retain the purity of the Church, as well as their emphasis on enforcing division.²⁰⁷ The text appeals to the inspiration and authority of the martyrs to justify and validate separation from the Catholic Church: the *traditores*.²⁰⁸ The introduction to the *Acts* proclaims: ‘Once error has been condemned, let whoever rejoices in the Lord’s truth read the records of the martyrs so as to hold fast to the Catholic Church [i.e. the Donatist Church] and distinguish the holy communion from the unholy’.²⁰⁹ Throughout the account, this

²⁰³ Maureen Tilley warns that the description of the Donatist Church as the ‘Church of the Martyrs’ should not be exaggerated. If so, it becomes ‘a polemical retrojection of more subtle divisions between the two groups’. Furthermore, such a sharp distinction does not consider the importance of martyrdom in the Catholic Church. See Tilley, ‘Sustaining Donatist Self-Identity: From the Church of the Martyrs to the *Collecta* of the Desert’, *JECs*, 5 (1997), 21-35, at 22.

²⁰⁴ J. K. Coyle, ‘Particularities of Christianity in Roman Africa’, *SP*, 39 (2006), 13-26, at 23.

²⁰⁵ Alan Dearn, ‘Voluntary Martyrdom and the Donatist Schism’, *SP*, 39 (2003), 27-32. See also Tilley (1997), 22.

²⁰⁶ Coyle (2006), 24-25.

²⁰⁷ *The Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs* (Tilley: 25-49).

²⁰⁸ For background on the text, see Maureen A. Tilley, ‘Scripture as Element of Social Control: Two Martyr Stories of Christian North Africa’, *HTR*, 83 (1990), 383-97, esp. 391-97; *eadem* (1997), esp. 22-24.

²⁰⁹ *The Acts of the Abitinian Martyrs*, 1 (Tilley: 27).

message is repeated in the experiences of the martyrs. Finally, it is reaffirmed in the conclusion:

[O]ne must flee and curse the whole corrupt congregation of all the polluted people and all must seek the glorious lineage of the blessed martyrs, the one, holy, and true Church from which the martyrs arise, and whose divine mysteries the martyrs observe. She alone broke the force of infernal persecution; she preserved the law of the Lord even to the shedding of blood.²¹⁰

As Maureen Tilley summarizes: 'In this martyr story the biblical message is not the comforting theme of unity and peace but the strident call for condemnation and division. Not reconciliation but separation and excommunication is the cry of these martyrs'.²¹¹ The Donatist claim to be the direct inheritors and exclusive possessors of the martyrs would have had a special force in North Africa, where the memory of martyrdom was a vital element for the construction of Christian history, identity, and ecclesiology.²¹² In this environment, such close identification with the martyrs would have tapped into the needs and desires of ordinary Christians, who were offered the chance to be part of that history of heroism, and to perpetuate that same spirit and devotion.

In many areas of North Africa, the Donatists were the majority Church.²¹³ At the most practical level, Augustine had to promote the cult of the martyrs if he wanted to prevent his congregations from attending the rival martyr festivals of the Donatists. As J. den Boeft observes: 'For Augustine it was indispensable to defy such claims [of the Donatists' exclusive possession of the martyrs]. If they were left unanswered, the catholic position could be severely weakened, martyrdom being the object of the greatest awe among Christians of both confessions'.²¹⁴ Also, on an ecclesiological level, Augustine had to protect the unity, diversity, and universality of the Catholic Church against the local and exclusive ecclesiology of the

²¹⁰ *ibid.* 23 (Tilley: 48).

²¹¹ Tilley (1990), 395.

²¹² Coyle (2006), 17: 'Only there could the Catholic/Donatist quarrel have been conceived, for it was peculiarly African, engaging those pillars of bible and Church, the tradition of martyrdom, regional praxes, and the issue of the true *ecclesia Africae*'. See also Frend (1982), 154; Quasten (1940), 254.

²¹³ Tilley (1997), 22.

²¹⁴ den Boeft (1989), 118.

Donatists.²¹⁵ Augustine did this by questioning the Donatist claim to be the rightful owners of the martyrs, and retrieving the martyrs as the exclusive property of the Catholic Church. He compared and contrasted the true martyrs (*martyres veri*) of the Catholic Church with the false martyrs (*martyres falsi*) of the Donatist Church. For Augustine, the distinction was based on motivation. While both Catholic and Donatist martyrs suffered torture and death, their actions were motivated by different causes. The true martyrs of the Catholic Church were motivated by a just cause (love); the false martyrs of the Donatist Church were motivated by a selfish cause (pride).²¹⁶

Augustine runs with the theme of true and false martyrdom in both his sermons and treatises. Here the distinction is an effective tactic for proving the authenticity and superiority of Catholic martyrs, while polarising and invalidating Donatist claims to possess the martyrs. So, for example, in the long letter *On the Correction of the Donatists* (*De correctione Donatistarum*), he says:

[W]e should understand in the psalm the cry of the true martyrs who desire to distinguish themselves from false martyrs, *Judge me, O God, and distinguish my cause from that of an unholy people* (Ps. 43:1). The psalmist did not say, “Distinguish my punishment”, but, *Distinguish my cause*. For the punishment of martyrs can be like that of the wicked, but their cause is different.²¹⁷

The same sentiment, illustrated by the same scriptural quotation, is also found in his sermons, although with a slightly stronger exhortatory tone. For example, in a sermon delivered at the festival of the North African martyrs Castus and Aemilius, Augustine says:

In a word, if you wish to imitate true martyrs, choose yourselves a cause, so that you can say to the Lord, *Judge me, O Lord, and distinguish my cause from an unholy nation* (Ps. 43:1). Distinguish, not my pain and punishment, because an unholy nation has that too; but my cause, which only a holy nation has. So choose yourself a cause, hold onto a good and just cause, and with the Lord’s help have no fear of any pain or punishment.²¹⁸

²¹⁵ The desire for unity and universality is seen in *s.* 335G.2 (WSA III/9: 244): ‘let us honour the martyrs inside, in the Catholic Church, who have grace not effrontery, piety not temerity, constancy not obstinacy, who represent gathering, not scattering’.

²¹⁶ *en. Ps.* 59.9 (WSA III/17: 187); *s.* 285.7 (WSA III/8: 99).

²¹⁷ *ep.* 185.9 (WSA II/3: 184-85).

²¹⁸ *s.* 285.7 (WSA III/8: 99). cf. *s.* 325.2 (WSA III/9: 168-69), 335.2 (WSA III/9: 209), 335G.2 (WSA III/9: 244), 359B.18 (WSA III/11: 347).

And in another sermon preached at the festival of some unnamed martyrs, he directly links the psalm to an attack on the Donatists:

Many people endure tribulation; they have equivalent pains, but not equivalent causes... Heretics too suffer, and very often at their own hands; and they want to be called martyrs. But it is against them that we have sung, *Distinguish my cause from an unholy people*. It is not the punishment that makes the martyr but the cause.²¹⁹

Variations on the aphorism *non poena, sed causa* become a memorable and almost formulaic motto in Augustine's preaching and writing against the Donatists.²²⁰ This message is often illustrated by the example of the two robbers who were crucified alongside Jesus.²²¹ All three died in the same way – outwardly appearing to undergo the same suffering – but the reasons for their deaths were very different.²²² In his sermon on Castus and Aemilius, Augustine explains: 'They placed the two robbers on either side, but they did not have a similar cause. They were flanking Christ as he hung there, but they were far removed from him in reality. They were crucified by their crimes, he by ours'.²²³ An implicit message is that the two criminals crucified alongside Jesus illustrate the two Churches: one Catholic, the other Donatist. Both had been punished with death on account of their sins, but while one of the criminals audaciously mocked and taunted Jesus, the good thief humbled himself and confessed his faith in Christ. The good thief's humility and confession meant that, although he still had to die, he would rise again with Christ in heaven. Here Augustine uses the weight and authority of the Bible to reject the Donatist martyrs and legitimate the validity of Catholic martyrs.

According to Augustine's criterion of martyrdom by motivation, true martyrdom is not simply a baptism in blood. Death alone is not the cause for

²¹⁹ s. 327.1 (WSA III/9: 173).

²²⁰ For example, *ep.* 89.2 (WSA II/1: 359; PL 33: 0310): *martyres veros non faciat poena, sed causa*; s. 275.1 (WSA III/8: 26; PL: 38: 1254): *martyres discernit causa, non poena*; s. 285.2 (WSA III/8: 95; PL 38: 1293): *martyrem Dei non facit poena, sed causa*. See also s. 325.2 (WSA III/9: 168-69), 328.4, 7 (WSA III/9: 177-78, 179), 335.2 (WSA III/9: 209), 335C.5 (WSA III/9: 222-23), 335G.2 (WSA III/9: 244). See further den Boeft (1989), 118.

²²¹ Mt. 27:38; Lk. 23:32-43.

²²² *en. Ps.* 34(2).1 (WSA III/16: 59).

²²³ s. 285.2 (WSA III/8: 95). See also s. 325.2 (WSA III/9: 168-69), 327.2 (WSA III/9: 173-74), 328.7 (WSA III/9: 179-80), 335.2 (WSA III/9: 209); *ep.* 185.9 (WSA II/3: 184).

glorification.²²⁴ While the Donatists court death,²²⁵ demanding to be glorified as martyrs,²²⁶ they do not die for the sake of justice, because, as the gospel says: ‘Blessed are those who suffer persecution for the sake of justice’ (Mt. 5:10).²²⁷ While true martyrs suffer on account of truth (*pro veritate patiuntur*), false martyrs suffer on account of falsehood (*pro falsitate patiuntur*).²²⁸ In fact, Augustine says, the martyrs of the Donatist Church died to *conceal* the truth: ‘what they are dying for is to stop the truth being proclaimed, to stop the truth being preached, stop the truth being grasped, stop unity being loved, charity being chosen, eternity being grasped’.²²⁹

Augustine also appeals to the authority of Cyprian to maintain that martyrdom in schism is an empty act because it is not performed with charity.²³⁰ The true martyr’s motivation is pure and chaste love, which is shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit, and is received only by those who are in the unity of the Catholic Church: there is no salvation outside the Church.²³¹ The Holy Spirit does not only incite love, but also speaks for the martyr at the time of trial: ‘the Lord observed that *every man is a liar* (Ps. 116:15.11), and gave the martyrs his Spirit, so that consequently they would not be liars, but would be telling the truth. There you are, that is why they were truthful; because it was not they who were speaking, but his Spirit’.²³² If the Holy Spirit is not present outside the Catholic Church then the Donatist martyrs do not speak the truth, and so they bear empty testimony and false witness.

²²⁴ *c. litt. Pet.* 2.23.52 (NPNF 4: 543); *s.* 283.6 (WSA III/11: 248), 328.7 (WSA III/9: 179), 359B.17 (WSA III/346-47).

²²⁵ For the accusation that the martyrs court death, see *ep.* 185.11-12 (WSA II/3: 186-87); *Io. ev. tr.* 51.10(2) (FC 88: 276-77). For a cautionary note on the polemic of this claim, see Dearn (2003).

²²⁶ *ep.* 185.8 (WSA II/3: 184); *Io. ev. tr.* 11.15(1) (FC 79: 26-27).

²²⁷ For the unjust cause of the Donatist martyrs, see *ep.* 185.9 (WSA II/3: 184-85). For true martyrdom suffered for the sake of justice, see *s.* 283.6 (WSA III/11: 248), 325.2 (WSA III/9: 168-69), 335G.2 (WSA III/9: 244), 359B.17 (WSA III/11: 346-47).

²²⁸ *s.* 328.4 (WSA III/9: 177; PL 38: 1453).

²²⁹ *s.* 325.2 (WSA III/9: 168).

²³⁰ *bapt.* 17.25 (NPNF 4: 458).

²³¹ *Io. ev. tr.* 93.1 (FC 90: 173-74).

²³² *s.* 328.3 (WSA III/9: 177). This is an allusion to Mt. 10:19-20, which Augustine quotes just prior to this passage: ‘When they hand you over, do not give thought to what you should speak, or what you should say; for it will be given you at that moment what you should speak. For you are not the ones who speak, but it is the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you’. For the Spirit speaking in the martyrs, see *s.* 276.2 (WSA III/8: 30), 299.3 (WSA III/8: 230), 335E.5 (WSA III/9: 237).

Finally, for Augustine, while the Donatists claimed to be descendants of the martyrs, their actions, pride, and vanity prove that this was not the case.²³³ The Donatists claimed a special link with Cyprian, but, Augustine says, they should think twice: ‘The heretics, though, and the Donatists, who falsely boast that Cyprian belongs to them, should pay attention to the way he exercised his office of bishop, and then they would not break away; to the way he went to his martyrdom, and then they would not throw themselves over cliffs’.²³⁴ According to Augustine, not only were the Donatists wrong to identify themselves with the persecuted Church, but, in fact, they would be more correct to identify themselves with the persecutors of the martyrs, as they continue the era of persecution by terrorising the Catholic Church.²³⁵

Devotion to the martyrs in the Donatist Church was one of the main factors that led Augustine to reflect more deeply on the martyrs. Yet, it is interesting to find that his anti-Donatist reflections on the martyrs do not vary considerably between his writing and his sermons. The themes that he develops in his writings (true and false martyrdom; cause not punishment; the three crosses) were all readily adapted into pithy slogans and memorable images in his sermons. Whether addressing readers or listeners, Augustine’s depictions of the martyrs serve the same purpose: to encourage unity, love, peace, and humility. The main difference between the written and spoken depictions is detected less in the content, and more in the pastoral drive, of the sermons:

All heretics also suffer for what is false, not for the truth; because they are lying against Christ himself. All pagans, whatever they suffer, they suffer for what is false ... So, brothers and sisters, let us struggle as long as we live to hold on to the true faith, to remain in the true Church of God, to lead a good life, if we love the martyrs, so that having a good cause we may be in a position to imitate them.²³⁶

Conclusion: Martyrdom in Context

In this chapter we have introduced a range of themes and ideas that we will pick up and explore throughout this study: the humanity and humility of the martyrs; their complete dependence on God’s grace; tensions between the audience’s expectations

²³³ *en. Ps.* 101(2).9 (WSA III/19:69).

²³⁴ *s.* 313E.2 (WSA III/9: 110).

²³⁵ For this sentiment see *ep.* 88.1, 6, 8 (WSA II/1: 351-52, 354, 356).

²³⁶ *s.* 328.4, 8 (WSA III/9: 177, 180).

and the preacher's intentions; the ability of the martyrs to stir and calm the emotions. From the specific examples that we have discussed, we can provide some general observations on how Augustine's depictions of the martyrs were shaped by context. In the context of his sermons, his depictions were shaped by the expectations, hopes, and fears of his listening audience. In the context of his written treatises and letters, he altered his depictions depending on his anticipated audience, whether they would be Christians like Paulinus, pagans like Maximus, or heretics like Faustus. In all his works, his depictions of the martyrs were shaped by other factors, such as the atmosphere of celebration that accompanied martyr festivals, the physical and psychological devastation that resulted from the Sack of Rome, and the discussions and debates that arose from the Pelagian and Donatist controversies. All the examples that we have explored demonstrate that Augustine's depictions of the martyrs were embedded in the context of a community that was trying to define itself over, against, and as part of, wider society.

Furthermore, we have seen that Augustine's depictions of the martyrs were constructed and employed as communications. They were used as examples, illustrations, and proofs to engage the minds of Christians, silence the arguments of the hostile, and provoke a response from the audience. As with all his communications, Augustine adapted his message to suit different situations. By appealing to shared cultural assumptions and religious beliefs, explaining the finer details for the less familiar, varying his message, changing his tone, and altering the focal points, he carefully tailored his depictions of the martyrs so that they would satisfy what his audience needed – as well as what they wanted – to hear. We now turn to expand on this observation, as we consider how Augustine constructed his depictions of the martyrs.

Chapter 2

METHODS OF REPRESENTATION

In his writing and preaching Augustine engaged in the creative process of making martyrs. By exploring the methods that he used to depict the martyrs, we can see this process in progress, as it were. In this chapter we explore the five main methods of representation that Augustine used to depict both male and female martyrs: i) removing narrative structure; ii) avoiding descriptions of the tortured body; iii) censoring images of female nudity; iv) deleting the speeches of the martyrs; v) abstracting the martyrs' personal names. Throughout the course of this chapter, we will also consider some exceptions to the rules.

As we will see, one of the most striking characteristics of Augustine's depictions of the martyrs is the comparative lack of detail. While this might be expected, to some extent, in his written works, even his sermons delivered at martyr festivals often do not contain details of the martyrs' trials, suffering, and deaths. This stands in stark contrast to other sources of the period, particularly Greek martyr homilies, in which narrative details are embellished to create rich, vibrant, and memorable portraits of the martyrs. Unlike his contemporaries, Augustine rarely tried to grasp the attention of his audience by reverting to lurid descriptions of torture or describing the naked bodies of female martyrs. But his depictions of the martyrs are no less fascinating than those of his contemporaries. While he does not excite his audience with the thrill of blood, nudity, or narrative climax, he captivates them with the more chaste enjoyment of articulate word-play, clever puns, and brief yet lucid similes. Guiding his listeners on a journey through the homiletic probing of martyr *passiones*, he leads them towards the spiritually satisfying revelation of divine truths.

Augustine's depictions of the martyrs are less explicit than Prudentius's poetic rendering of the dismemberment of Hippolytus, less evocative than Gregory of Nyssa's description of the frostbitten limbs of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste, less dramatic than Chrysostom's thrilling performances of devilish fury. Augustine depicts the martyrs with an extraordinary subtlety that tames, sanitises, and spiritualises the cruel deaths to render martyrdom useful and meaningful for all people, times, and places. By focusing on a martyr's name, or the hidden meaning of

their martyrdom, he shifts the emphasis away from the single moment of the martyr's death to reveal the eternal truths that are expressed by martyrdom.

As Frederik van der Meer observes, Augustine's simplicity of style is quite striking when it is compared to the elaboration and ornamentation of his contemporaries:

In the chorus of eulogists who sing the praises of the martyrs, Augustine has an unmistakable voice of his own. He cannot compete with the pious fireworks let off by Asterius nor with the polished panegyrics with which Gregory of Nazianzus entrances the faithful... He was, as always, brief, gave little thought to anything in the nature of an *ekphrasis*, but invariably at a certain point plunged into the business of instruction or exhortation. It never entered his mind to retell with flourishes and embellishments the *passio* that had just been read. He was only concerned for the honour of his heroes and set out to make sure that their dignity and the faith of his listeners received full measure.²³⁷

In this chapter we will consider the novelty and uniqueness of Augustine's depictions of the martyrs. But, while our discussion will support and expand van der Meer's observation, we will find that Augustine did not avoid certain methods of representation simply because he 'gave little thought' to them, or that they 'never entered his mind'. As we consider not only the methods of representation that he used, but also why he chose those particular methods over their alternatives, we will see that Augustine gave careful consideration to the techniques that he employed when depicting the martyrs. He realised that the different methods he could use to describe the martyrs would affect the way that his audience would receive and respond to the depictions. For this reason, he gave great care and attention to selecting those methods of representation that would help him to create depictions for his audience to perceive, receive, and respond to in a holy and appropriate way.

i. Removing Narrative Structure

The first method of representation that we encounter concerns narrative structure: the "story" of the martyr's trial, torture, and death. Martyrdom narratives were often incorporated into North African martyr festivals, as they were read aloud during the Liturgy of the Word, before the sermon was delivered.²³⁸ In this context, the sermon

²³⁷ van der Meer (1961), 492.

²³⁸ s. 274.1 (WSA III/8: 23), 280.1 (WSA III/8: 72), 299F.1 (WSA III/8: 271), 335A.1 (WSA III/9: 211). Martyrdom narratives were not available for all the martyrs: see s. 315.1 (WSA III/9: 129).

functioned as a direct commentary on the martyrdom narrative. Even in those places where it was not customary to read martyrdom narratives aloud in the context of the liturgy, or on those occasions when martyrdom narratives were not available for a particular martyr, preachers often refer back to the written or oral traditions to retell the martyr's story.²³⁹ But Augustine does not do this. In his sermons on the martyrs, he removes the narrative structure.

Augustine replaces the chronological sequence of connected episodes found in the martyrdom narrative with a thematic structure, which is organised around the analysis of a particular word, or the explanation of a certain theological idea. His sermons are constructed from a set of disconnected reflections that are inspired by the narratives, but are presented as individual units of information, such as thoughts on the trials of life, or comments on the fear of death. By replacing the narrative structure with a thematic structure, Augustine encourages his listeners to remember only the small fragments of detail that he chooses to bring to their attention. The rest of the narrative is filtered out and cast into shadow.

And yet, Augustine does not erase the narrative structure altogether. His thematic approach extracts the martyrs from their historical narrative, and superimposes them onto the grand narrative of salvation history. The martyrs are seen against the panoramic backdrop of the cosmic drama of creation, the Fall, and redemption. This shift from historical narrative to theological narrative makes historical truth subordinate to the theological framework into which the martyrs are placed and perceived. In this way, the message of martyrdom is extended beyond the temporal and the particular to the a-temporal and eternal.

One example of this movement from narrative structure to thematic structure, and from historical narrative to theological narrative, is found in the sermons that Augustine delivered at the festivals of the two female martyrs, Perpetua and Felicitas.²⁴⁰ He delivered these sermons after the public reading of the martyrdom

²³⁹ The tradition varied regionally; martyrdom narratives were read aloud at martyr festivals in Africa, Spain, and Gaul, but not in Rome. It also seems that they were not read aloud at martyr festivals in the East.

²⁴⁰ *s.* 280-82 (WSA III/8: 72-82). See also *s.* 159A (WSA III/11: 135-43); *en. Ps.* 47.13 (WSA III/16: 347). Edmund Hill suggests that *s.* 335H might also have been delivered at a festival of Perpetua and Felicitas, but his evidence (the delivery of the sermon at the beginning of Lent, and the play on the word *felicitas*) is strained: see *s.* 335H (WSA III/9: 246-47). While *s.* 394 (WSA III/10: 429-30) on Perpetua and Felicitas, has been attributed to Augustine, it is not considered to be authentic.

narrative.²⁴¹ And so, the vivid and personal account of the martyrdom narrative would have been fresh in the minds of his listening audience.

In his sermons on Perpetua and Felicitas, Augustine deconstructs the martyrdom narrative into small units. He extracts, abstracts, and dislocates fragments from the narrative sequence to bring to the attention of his audience. He holds these pieces up to the light, analyses them out loud, and explains their significance within the composition. Then he puts the pieces down in different places to rearrange the narrative and produce a picture of his own design. This thematic treatment of the martyrdom narrative reflects his general advice on scriptural exegesis, as found in *On Teaching the Uninstructed*:

This does not imply, however, either that we ought to repeat by memory the entire Pentateuch, and the entire Books of Judges, and Kings, and Esdras, and the entire Gospel and Acts of the Apostles, if we have learned all these word for word; or that we should put all the matters which are contained in these volumes into our own words, and in that manner unfold and expound them as a whole. For neither does the time admit of that, nor does any necessity demand it. But what we ought to do is to give a comprehensive statement of all things, summarily and generally, so that certain of the wonderful facts may be selected... [I]nstead of exhibiting them to view only in their wrappings, if we may so speak, and then instantly snatching them from our sight, we ought to dwell on them for a certain space, and thus, as it were, unfold them and open them out to vision, and present them to the minds of the hearers as things to be examined and admired.²⁴²

In his sermons on Perpetua and Felicitas, Augustine explores, unwraps, loosens, and expands individual episodes from the narrative. The image that he produces is similar to, but different from, the original image found in the martyrdom narrative. The devil pushes forward Perpetua's father and whispers deceiving words into his ear; Felicitas lies in the prison labouring with a miraculous childbirth while Eve watches from one side and Mary helps from the other; Perpetua is conformed to Christ by her imitation of his passion; God looks down from heaven, laughing and mocking the vicious crowd in the amphitheatre whose shouts and roars attack the martyrs like the bites of lions; the women fight like men as they blunt and deflect the devil's attacks; Christ stands beside Perpetua and offers her the cup of his suffering; the dead bodies of the martyrs lie in the amphitheatre and pour out blood from which

²⁴¹ See s. 280.1 (WSA III/8: 72), 282.2 (WSA III/8: 81). See further *The Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas* (Musurillo: 106-31).

²⁴² *cat. rud.* 3.5 (NPNF 3: 285).

fertile buds spring up; the transformed bodies of Perpetua and Felicitas glow in heaven, adorned with blossoming garlands, and joined together in a loving embrace.

As Augustine deconstructs and reconstructs the narrative, he explains the individual scenes in relation to more general themes, such as the fear of death, the temptations of the world, the comparison of temporal suffering and eternal life, the right order of love, and the necessity of God's grace.²⁴³ As he fragments and rearranges the narrative, he stitches together the individual episodes with deeper theological meanings, and he weaves them into the grand narrative of the cosmic drama.

An Exception: Lawrence

Augustine did not always avoid narrative detail. In some of his sermons on the martyrs we do find sequential plots that echo or retell the martyrdom narrative. The best examples of this are his sermons on the martyr Lawrence. In one of these sermons, Augustine relates the story of the martyr's trials and tortures:

Saint Lawrence was an archdeacon. The treasures of the Church were demanded of him by the persecutor, as the tradition states. Which is why he suffered such dreadful torments, it is quite horrifying to hear about them. Placed on a gridiron, he was scorched all over his body, tortured with the most excruciating pain by fire. Yet he overcame all these bodily afflictions with the sturdy strength of his charity... Now this is what he did, to stoke up the fires of the persecutor's rage... "Let some carts come with me," he said, "in which I can bring along the Church's treasures." Carts were sent, he loaded them with the poor, and ordered them to go back, saying, "These are the treasures of the Church".²⁴⁴

Clearly this extract has a narrative quality. It retells an episode from the story in a sequential and descriptive manner, it explains the martyr's status as a deacon, and it even relates the reported words of the martyr. But the story is narrated out of sequence. It begins with a reference to the torture that resulted in Lawrence's death, and it ends with a description of the events that provoked the torture. By rearranging the narrative structure, Augustine effectively creates a flashback to Lawrence's gathering and presentation of the poor. Here the revised structure emphasises the moral of the story, rather than the moment of martyrdom. Lawrence's story is not presented as the main focus of the sermon, but it is used as a helpful introduction to a

²⁴³ We explore some of these theological themes in greater detail in Chapter Four, below.

²⁴⁴ s. 302.8 (WSA III/8: 304).

much bigger message that extends beyond the specific details of his martyrdom. So, Augustine draws the moral message from his story:

And it is true, brothers and sisters; the needs of the needy are the great wealth and treasure of Christians, if we really understand where we should be saving what we possess. The needy are in front of us; if we deposit our savings with them, we will not lose them. We are not afraid of anybody making off with them; the one who gave them to us, you see, is keeping them safe.²⁴⁵

Here Augustine preserves the narrative structure of the account of Lawrence's martyrdom. But, by rearranging the order of events, he creates the same effect as he would by removing the narrative structure. The specific and particular details of the historical event fade into the shadows, while the general and a-temporal truths are brought to the foreground.

Augustine retains the narrative structure in another sermon on the martyr Lawrence:

He [Lawrence] was a deacon, following the apostles; he was after the apostles' time. So when a persecution, which as you heard just now from the gospel had been foretold to Christians, was raging furiously in Rome as in other places, and the goods of the Church were demanded from him, as being the archdeacon, he is reported to have replied, "Let the carts be sent with me, in which to bring the wealth of the Church"... Avarice opened wide its jaws, but wisdom knew what it was doing; the order was given immediately; as many carts as he asked for went along. Now he asked for a great many; and the more carts there were, so much greater were the hopes of loot which were raised in the persecutor's heart. He filled the carts with the poor, and returned with them; and they said to him, "What's all this?" He answered, "These are the riches of the Church". The persecutor, made a fool of, called for fire; but Lawrence was not ice, that he should be afraid of flames. The former was almost on fire with rage, but the latter's soul even more so with charity. What more to be said? A gridiron was brought, and he was roasted on it. And he is said to have borne those torments with such calmness, that there was fulfilled in his case what we heard just now in the gospel, *In patience you will possess your souls* (Lk. 21:19). Finally, when he was burnt on one side, scorched by the flames, but calm in endurance, "It's now cooked," he said; "all that remains to do, turn me over and eat".²⁴⁶

This time Augustine relates the events leading up to the martyrdom in chronological order. But, again, the moment of the martyrdom is almost erased from the narrative. While we might expect Lawrence's martyrdom to be the climax of the account,

²⁴⁵ *ibid.*

²⁴⁶ *s.* 303.1 (WSA III/8: 313).

Augustine reduces it to just a few words: ‘A gridiron was brought, and he was roasted on it (*craticula admota est, et tostus est*)’.²⁴⁷ In our previous sermon, we saw that Augustine reminded his listeners about Lawrence’s tortures, which are horrifying to hear about (*tam multa passus est, quae horrent audiri*),²⁴⁸ and he described how Lawrence’s whole body was scorched by the fierce flames of the gridiron (*Impositus craticulae, omnibus membris adustus est, poenis atrocissimis flammaram excruciatu est*).²⁴⁹ But here the details are condensed into three short words: *et tostus est*.

While Augustine almost erases the moment of martyrdom from the narrative, he expands the narrative in other places. Again, the account of Lawrence’s gathering of the poor is given the most room in the account. But here there is also an emphasis on Lawrence’s calm and patient endurance. Augustine relates that Lawrence endured his tortures calmly (*tranquillitate*), so that his actions fulfilled the words of the gospel (*in patientia vestra possidebitis animas vestras*).²⁵⁰ He repeats this, as he affirms that Lawrence was calm in endurance (*patientia tranquillus*). This calmness is expressed by the morbidly humorous words of the martyr (*coctum est... versate me, et manducate*).²⁵¹ By focusing on Lawrence’s calm state of mind, Augustine zooms in, as it were, on the spiritual meaning of the narrative. The martyr’s calm disposition points towards the happy ending that concludes his story: ‘Such was the martyrdom he achieved; that was the glory he was crowned with... What must his glory be with God, when he has won such praise from men?’²⁵²

The exceptional case of Lawrence illustrates that, even when Augustine retained narrative structure in his sermons, he modified the sequence and climax of the story to draw attention to the theological framework in which the individual stories were embedded.

²⁴⁷ *ibid.* (PL 38: 1394).

²⁴⁸ *s.* 302.8 (WSA III/8: 304; PL: 38: 1388).

²⁴⁹ *ibid.*

²⁵⁰ *s.* 303.1 (WSA III/8: 313; PL 38: 1394).

²⁵¹ *ibid.*

²⁵² *ibid.* (WSA III/8: 314).

ii. *Avoiding Descriptions of the Tortured Body*

Another (related) method that Augustine used to reform the memory of the martyrs concerns graphic descriptions of torture and death. Peter Brown explains that gruesome images were central to the memory of martyrdom in late antiquity: ‘It is the image of the *cruciabiles poenae*, of the excruciating torments which had accompanied the deaths of the martyrs, that surged forwards, in the late fourth century if not earlier, to take centre stage’.²⁵³ Daniel Baraz makes a similar observation: ‘Whatever the reservations in earlier periods concerning the explicit reference to cruelty and their motivations, they seem to fade away in the Latin West in the course of the fourth century. Cruelty moves more and more to the foreground’.²⁵⁴ Baraz identifies this as a particular trend in the Latin West: ‘cruelty is an explicit issue mainly in [martyrdom] accounts produced in the Latin part of the Empire, not in those produced in the Greek cultural sphere’.²⁵⁵ Although the sharp juxtaposition of the Latin West and the Greek East does not take into account the violent realism of descriptions of martyrdom in Greek martyr homilies, Baraz and Brown draw our attention to a popular trend that we might expect to find in Augustine’s depictions of the martyrs.²⁵⁶

The importance of cruelty and violence for the memory of martyrdom is particularly evident in Greek martyr homilies from the fourth century. Throughout the course of the homilies, many preachers refer to themselves as painters or writers, who impress images, or inscribe words, upon the minds of their listeners.²⁵⁷ These preachers present their listeners with highly visual, chronological and episodic narratives, which unfold in cinematic progression from the occasion of the martyr’s

²⁵³ Brown (2000b), 6-7.

²⁵⁴ Daniel Baraz, *Medieval Cruelty: Changing Perceptions, Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003), 39.

²⁵⁵ *ibid.* 43.

²⁵⁶ For the general taste of graphic and theatrical descriptions of the suffering body, see also Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in Early Christianity* (London: Routledge, 1994).

²⁵⁷ This is especially evident in the homilies of John Chrysostom. For example, *A Homily on the Holy Martyrs*, 8 (Mayer: 226), *A Homily on Saint Barlaam*, 10 (Mayer: 186), *On the Holy Maccabees and their Mother*, 11 (Mayer: 145). Basil, *Homily on the Martyr Gordius*, 2 (Allen: 59), *Homily on the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste*, 2 (Allen: 68-69).

arrest through to the moment of his or her death.²⁵⁸ The narrative is fleshed-out as the graphic detail of torture is expanded and the suffering body is described with clinical precision. Taking the advice of rhetorical handbooks, the preachers use the mnemonic device of violent and bloody images,²⁵⁹ and make their words even more memorable by employing unusual similes that catch the attention of the listener.²⁶⁰ So, for example, John Chrysostom describes the martyrs lying on burning hot coals as if they were reclining on soft beds of roses; he compares the blood that poured out from their bodies with the saffron-coloured rays of the morning sun; he says that the lymphatic fluid that seeped from their wounds glowed brighter than the stars in the night sky.²⁶¹ Sensually evocative descriptions make the images even more memorable. The listeners encounter the disturbing sight of disembowelled bodies, the smell of burning flesh, the chilling breath of ice-cold air, and the sound of bones being shattered and bodily fluids hissing amid the flames.²⁶² This multi-sensory experience was intended to prompt the listener to create a mental image or snapshot of the martyr, which would reside within the memory, and enable a constant feeling of immediacy and direct spectatorship.²⁶³ The more evocative the image, the sharper the memory.

Here the preachers of Greek martyr homilies reveal their rhetorical training. The construction of vivid images to evoke an emotional response was considered to be the main goal of ancient oratory, particularly in a judicial context. This is

²⁵⁸ For example, Gregory of Nyssa, *Homily 1b on the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste*, 145 (Leemans: 98): 'let us then narrate everything about the martyrs step by step, in a way that brings their contest under your eyes on this very stage'.

²⁵⁹ For the mnemonic function of violent images, see Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval literature (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 101.

²⁶⁰ *ibid.* 131: 'Quintilian says approvingly that "the more remote a simile is from the subject to which it is applied, the greater will be the impression of novelty and the unexpected which it produces". The cognitive value of surprise and novelty applies particularly to memory, for we remember best what is unusual and so catches our attention'.

²⁶¹ Chrysostom, *On the Holy Martyrs*, 4, 5 (Mayer: 222), *A Homily on the Martyr Julian*, 2 (Mayer: 132).

²⁶² For example, Basil, *Homily on the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste*, 5 (Allen: 71-72); Gregory of Nyssa, *Homily 1b on the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste*, 153 (Leemans: 105); Chrysostom, *A Homily on the Martyr Julian*, 3 (Mayer: 133), *On the Holy Martyrs*, esp. 4, 8 (Mayer: 221-22, 226), *A Homily on Saint Romanus*, 7 (Mayer: 232).

²⁶³ For mental images (*visiones* or *phantasiai*), see Quintilian, *On Teaching Oratory*, 6.2.29-30, cited in Ruth Webb, 'Imagination and the Arousal of the Emotions in Greco-Roman Rhetoric', in Susanna Morton Braund and Christopher Gill (eds.), *The Passions in Roman Thought and Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 112-27, at 118.

especially clear in the use of *ekphrasis*, which was included as an exercise in the *progymnasmata*.²⁶⁴ The aim of *ekphrasis* was to paint an image with words: to make the reader or listener feel as if the object that is being described is placed before their eyes. So, Theon describes *ekphrasis* as ‘descriptive language, bringing what is portrayed clearly before the sight’.²⁶⁵ And Hermogenes explains: ‘The virtues of an *ekphrasis* are, most of all, clarity and vividness; for the expression should almost create seeing through hearing’.²⁶⁶ Such vivid depictions served to produce a memorable impression of the description on the minds of the readers and listeners.

This is exactly what we find in the Greek martyr homilies. The preacher’s vivid description placed the martyr before the eyes of his listening audience. As he made the absent martyr present, the listening audience would become a viewing audience. They would see the martyrs by hearing about the martyrs. But, at the same time, the audience was encouraged to look above and beyond the physical and tangible depictions of the martyrs. These are not morbid depictions. They affirm that the martyrs are witnesses who point to the presence and power of God. So, the preachers linger on the dark, grotesque, and unsettling details of torture only to create a type of *chiaroscuro* in which the bright light of divine truth breaks through to illuminate and enhance the beauty and truth of martyrdom. While *ekphrasis* helped to re-present the physical, tangible, and corporeal bodies of the martyrs, those very bodies were presented as sites at which the invisible and intangible presence of God was made present like a crash of lightning.

Upon first glance it might seem as if Augustine fits neatly into this scheme of preaching. Often he opens his sermons by equating the senses of hearing and seeing, as he describes the reading of the martyrdom narrative as a visual, theatrical performance that is re-enacted in front of his listening audience. So, at the beginning of a sermon on Perpetua and Felicitas, he comments on the reading of the *passio*: ‘all those things, recounted in such glowing words, we perceived with our ears, and saw with our minds’.²⁶⁷ Similarly, in a sermon on the Maccabean Martyrs, he says: ‘A

²⁶⁴ For the *progymnasmata*, see George A. Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric and its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times* (London: Croon Helm, 1980), 26-28; *idem*, *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), ix-xvi.

²⁶⁵ Theon, *Exercises*, 118 (Kennedy: 45).

²⁶⁶ Hermogenes, *Preliminary Exercises*, 23 (Kennedy: 86).

²⁶⁷ s. 280.1 (WSA III/8: 72; PL 38: 1281): ...*aure percepimus, mente spectavimus*.

tremendous spectacle has been set before the eyes of our faith. We heard with our ears, we saw with our hearts'.²⁶⁸ And again: 'when the marvellous account of their sufferings was read to us, we not only heard about them, but could practically see them as spectators'.²⁶⁹ This might lead us to expect that he too would create *ekphrases* of the martyrs. But he does not excite his audience with the thrill of violence or descriptions of suffering bodies. Instead, he speaks with an extraordinary subtlety which sanitises and spiritualises the cruel deaths.

Augustine's reserved depictions of the martyrs seem to be out of place in what has been referred to as 'a world awash with blood'.²⁷⁰ He describes the suffering body only very rarely. Even then, he does so with a great deal of reservation and moderation that reflects his general ambivalence towards the harmful power of mental images. His heavy-handed erasure of detail reduces the martyrs to hazy silhouettes and shadowy figures without features, voices, or names, to prevent his listeners from forming mental images that would be too vivid. Instead, he corrects the vision of his listeners by using variations of the slogan *non poena sed causa*: it is the cause, not the suffering (that makes a martyr).²⁷¹ With this memorable slogan, Augustine encourages his listeners to look away from the suffering body, and towards the spiritual truths expressed through martyrdom: namely, the power of God, the presence of Christ, the working of the Holy Spirit, and the reality of eternal life.

This is not to say that Augustine devalued the martyr's death. He considered martyrdom to be different from, and superior to, private witness or public confession. Martyrdom was a fulfilment of Scripture: 'Contend for truth's sake even to the death' (Sir. 4:8).²⁷² But suffering does not make a martyr: 'What is praiseworthy is not suffering persecution, not being arrested, not being whipped, not being imprisoned, not being outlawed, not being killed. But to endure all these things because your

²⁶⁸ s. 301.1 (WSA III/8: 282; PL 38: 1380): *Magnus spectaculum positum est ante oculos fidei nostrae. Aure audivimus, corde vidimus.*

²⁶⁹ s. 300.1 (WSA III/8: 276; PL 38: 1377): *non solum audivimus, sed etiam vidimus et spectavimus.*

²⁷⁰ Brown (2000b), 7.

²⁷¹ See n. 220 above.

²⁷² s. 284.5 (WSA III/8: 90-91), 286.1 (WSA III/8: 101).

cause is good – that merits praise’.²⁷³ The martyr’s witness is not defined by their death, although this does add weight and force to their testimony.

At this point we might ask: if the preachers of Greek martyr homilies used *ekphrasis* to communicate theological truths, why did Augustine avoid describing the suffering body? One explanation is that he wanted to avoid appearing to denigrate the body by glorifying death. A similar intention is found in one of his sermons in which he distances the martyr’s sacrifice from the Platonist’s rejection of the body:

So the martyrs of Christ, with prudent forethought, did not despise their bodies. This is a perverse and worldly philosophy, professed by people who do not believe in the resurrection of bodies. They [the Platonists] regard themselves, you see, as great despisers of the body, because they consider that they have their bodies as prisons, into which they think souls have been thrust, because they have previously sinned somewhere else. But God make both the body and the spirit; he is the creator of each, and he also recreates each... So the martyrs did not despise the flesh or persecute it, as if it were the enemy.²⁷⁴

Another explanation is that descriptions of the suffering body might easily become another distraction in a life that is a ‘vast thicket full of snares and perils’.²⁷⁵ Augustine had seen Alypius become obsessed with the blood-lust of the Roman games.²⁷⁶ He had watched people become slaves to the same curiosity when they felt compelled to look at a mangled corpse on the side of the street.²⁷⁷ He may have been concerned that descriptions of the suffering bodies of the martyrs would elicit the same curiosity.

More than just irrelevant inquisitiveness, Augustine classed curiosity (*curiositas*) among the three kinds of vices, alongside pride (*superbia*), and the lust of the flesh (*voluptas carnis*).²⁷⁸ As Mary Carruthers explains: ‘This meaning of *curiositas* has to do with the mental stance of the thinker... Being *curiosus* is the opposite of the state of being *attentus*, “attentive” and “concentrated”’. It is what

²⁷³ *en. Ps.* 68(1).9 (WSA III/17: 374).

²⁷⁴ *s.* 277.3 (WSA III/8: 34).

²⁷⁵ *conf.* 10.35,56 (WSA I/1: 274).

²⁷⁶ *ibid.* 6.8 (122). See also *s.* 313A.3-4 (WSA III/9: 92-93) for ‘the lust of the eyes’ at the theatre.

²⁷⁷ *conf.* 10.35,55 (WSA I/1: 273).

²⁷⁸ *en. Ps.* 8.13 (WSA III/15: 138); *conf.* 10.30,41 (WSA I/1: 263). Cf. 1 Jn 2:16.

happens when you lose track of what your images are cues *for*'.²⁷⁹ For Augustine, the martyrs are witnesses, and, as such, they are 'cues' for eternal truths. Like sign-posts, they must be used as a means to an end. When used correctly, the martyrs can bring the Christianity community into a closer relationship with God. But, when the martyrs are enjoyed as the object of *curiositas*, the mind becomes distracted and distended. Just as a person might find pleasure in the sight of a mangled corpse, so they might find pleasure in the mental image of a martyr's suffering body. The mind is pulled down to the physical and the temporal, instead of being directed to spiritual and eternal truths. And so, Augustine's decision to censor his descriptions of the suffering body may result from his awareness that his readers and listeners might attend to his words with a misguided intent.

Augustine's decision to avoid descriptions of the suffering bodies of the martyrs might also relate to the eschatological vision that shapes his theology: the death of the body is of little consequence when compared with the eternal life of the resurrected body and soul in heaven. The martyrs suffered horrific tortures, but their bodies will be resurrected, and their wounds will be transformed into badges of honour.²⁸⁰ The martyrs' corpses were violated, but the flesh of the martyr's dead body would never feel the pain of the eternal fires of hell.²⁸¹ Martyrdom is a movement from life to life, in which death is almost incidental. Death is the one split second when the martyrs close their eyes to this life and open them to the direct vision of God: 'What an honour and what an assurance it is to go hence joyfully, to go out gloriously amid affliction and distress; to shut in a moment the eyes men and the world are seen with, and to open them immediately to see God!'²⁸²

An Exception: Vincent

The main exception to this rule is found in Augustine's sermons on the martyr Vincent. Often he opens these sermons by referring to the reading of the martyr's *passio*. He describes the reading of the *passio* as a visual performance: 'We have

²⁷⁹ Carruthers (1998), 94 (emphasis in original). See also N. Joseph Torchia, 'Curiosity', art., in Fitzgerald (1999), 259-261.

²⁸⁰ *civ. Dei*, 22.19-21 (Dyson: 1149-152).

²⁸¹ *s.* 299E.2 (WSA III/8: 264-65).

²⁸² *s.* 303.2 (WSA III/8: 314).

been watching a magnificent spectacle with the eyes of faith’;²⁸³ ‘Our spirits have just taken in a great and very marvellous spectacle... As the reading proceeded, it made clear what words he heard, what words he replied with, what torments he overcame, and practically placed before our very eyes everything that took place’.²⁸⁴ He encourages his listening audience to remember the story that had been read aloud, to recall the words that Vincent spoke, the torments that he endured, and to picture the event as though it were being acted out before the mind’s eye:

In the passion which we have had chanted to us today, my dearest brothers and sisters, we are clearly shown a ferocious judge, a bloodthirsty torturer, an unvanquished, invincible martyr. His body was so ploughed up with various punishments that there were now no more torments left, and still his limbs endured.²⁸⁵

In this way, Augustine alludes to the narrative of Vincent’s martyrdom without having to repeat it. With the events already unfolding in his listeners’ minds, he could mention only those parts of the story that he considered to be most important.

In one of his sermons on Vincent, Augustine uncharacteristically draws attention to the numerous and gruesome tortures that Vincent endured:

Who would want to see an executioner at his savage work, and a man, lost to all humanity, tearing furiously at a human body? Who would enjoy observing limbs wrenched apart by the machinery of the rack? Who would not oppose the natural shape of a man being violated by human technique, bones disjoined by being stretched, laid bare by the flesh being clawed off them? Who could fail to be horrified? And yet the justice of the martyr was making all this horror beautiful; and the stupendous courage he showed for the faith, for religion, for the hope of the age to come, for the love of Christ, was shedding over the hideous and ghastly aspect of his torments and his wounds a magnificent glory.²⁸⁶

Augustine encourages his listeners to imagine Vincent undergoing excruciating torture: his body is stretched by the rack, his limbs are pulled out from their joints, and his flesh is ripped to expose his bones. They are to see this image as a repellent and horrific sight. But then they are advised to look again and watch as the beauty of

²⁸³ s. 274.1 (WSA III/8: 23).

²⁸⁴ s. 275.1 (WSA III/8: 26), 277A.1 (WSA III/8: 47), 359B.20 (WSA III/11: 328).

²⁸⁵ s. 276.1 (WSA III/8: 29).

²⁸⁶ s. 277A.1 (WSA III/8: 47).

the martyr's faith, hope, and love transforms the horrific sight into an image of awesome beauty.

As a descriptive and graphic account of martyrdom, Augustine's depiction of Vincent is not representative of his depictions of the martyrs. Nowhere else does he use such powerful images of physical torture, which are more suited to the golden mouth of John Chrysostom or the blood-stained pages of Prudentius's poems. And yet, Augustine's vivid depiction of Vincent seems tame in comparison with, for example, Gregory of Nyssa's clinical description of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste:

The strength of their bodies was dissolved little by little, weakened and exhausted by the frost... Their youthful bodies became black, their beauty withered away, and the colour of their flesh faded. Their fingers fell off, mutilated by the frost little by little and all their limbs and sense-organs were pounded to pieces by the bitter cold. For after a time their flesh became livid and swollen, it became rent all around the limbs until it fell off the bones and they could experience in reality the decay of a corpse.²⁸⁷

Similarly, his depiction of Vincent seems restrained when compared with Prudentius's depiction of Romanus:

Drawing the tongue far out from the mouth he [the doctor] puts the lancet inside, right down to the gullet. While he was gradually cutting the filaments one by one, the martyr never bit nor let his teeth meet to close his mouth, nor swallowed blood. Firm and unmoved he stood with jaws wide open while the blood ran gushing out.²⁸⁸

Augustine's most shocking depictions of the martyrs are more reserved than the graphic depictions of his contemporaries.

Although Vincent's martyrdom was a particularly gruesome one, the narratives and traditions of many other martyrs would have provided Augustine with the occasion to create graphic descriptions of the suffering body. His failure to do so reveals a deliberate and willed decision to avoid those details. While he did comment on the horror of martyrdom in his sermons and treatises, his emphasis was not on the *cruciabiles poenae*, but the theological messages that they communicated. The horrific torments of the martyrs testify to the truth of eternal life. They point back to the mystery of the Incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ. They reveal the inner working of grace that strengthens the martyrs.

²⁸⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, *Homily 1b on the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste*, 153 (Leemans: 105).

²⁸⁸ Prudentius, *Peristephanon*, 10.899-907 (LCL 398: 288-89).

iii. Censoring Female Nudity

If Augustine shied away from descriptions of the suffering body, this is even truer for his depictions of female martyrs. Early Christian representations of tortured (often naked, often beautiful, often young) female martyrs are so common that we might wonder whether this is a kind of pornography, created and perpetuated by men for the enjoyment of other men, and masked by the excuse of edification.²⁸⁹ For example, in *The Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas*, the narrator describes how the two women were stripped naked and brought into the amphitheatre in transparent nets. Felicitas had only just given birth in prison, and Perpetua, a recently nursing mother, still had milk dripping from her breasts.²⁹⁰ In *The Martyrdom of Saints Carpus, Papyrus, and Agathonice*, we read that, when Agathonice was sentenced to death, she removed her clothing and ‘when the crowd saw how beautiful she was, they grieved in mourning for her’.²⁹¹ In *The Martyrdom of Saint Crispina*, we read that the persecutor ordered for Crispina’s head to be shaved so that her beauty would become her shame.²⁹² This is not just the case for martyr *acta* and *passiones*. In the fourth century, Prudentius described how the young Eulalia watched happily as the executioners tore at her naked sides with metal claws.²⁹³ Victricius of Rouen gives brief descriptions of several female martyrs, including one female martyr who, ‘while her child went hungry, offered full breasts to the wild beasts’, and a virgin martyr who ‘submitted to the executioner a neck adorned with the necklace of virginity’.²⁹⁴ Both Prudentius and Ambrose depict the young virgin martyr, Agnes, in an openly sexualised manner.²⁹⁵ Likewise, Asterius’s *ekphrasis* on Euphemia depicts the female martyr in a submissive role as the executioners rage at her virginal body. In a scene which has connotations of rape,

²⁸⁹ See G. Clark (1993), 57.

²⁹⁰ *The Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas*, 20 (Musurillo: 129).

²⁹¹ *The Martyrdom of Saints Carpus, Papyrus, and Agathonice*, 6 (Musurillo: 35). The Greek recension relates that Agathonice took off her cloak, but does not record the crowd’s response (Musurillo: 29).

²⁹² *The Martyrdom of Saint Crispina*, 3 (Musurillo: 307).

²⁹³ Prudentius, *Peristephanon*, 3 (LCL 398: 151-52).

²⁹⁴ Victricius, *Praising the Saints*, 12 (G. Clark: 398).

²⁹⁵ See further, Virginia Burrus, ‘Word and Flesh: The Bodies and Sexuality of Ascetic Women in Christian Antiquity’, *JFSR*, 10 (1994), 27-51; *eadem*, ‘Reading Agnes: The Rhetoric of Gender in Ambrose and Prudentius’, *JECs*, 3 (1995), 25-46.

Asterius describes how the men, ‘under their tunics almost naked, began their work’.²⁹⁶ These accounts have prompted scholars, such as Margaret Miles, to conclude that female nakedness is a common theme of martyrdom narratives: ‘The regularity with which the female body and female nakedness was featured in *acta* and popular novels indicates that their readers expected such details, though they seldom note male martyrs’ nakedness’.²⁹⁷

But, in contrast, Augustine’s female martyrs are not stripped naked. Torture is not given sexual connotations. Breasts are not exposed. Beauty is not lamented. Bare flesh is not attacked with metal claws. In fact, female bodies are strangely absent from Augustine’s depictions of the female martyrs. Why is this? To answer this question, we must first realise that martyrdom narratives never contain one single meaning. There is never just one authoritative interpretation or objective meaning to a martyr’s story. Rather, there are a range of potential interpretations and a variety of possible meanings. It is precisely this characteristic that has made martyrdom narratives so popular throughout history, as they have been reinterpreted in different contexts, and re-read with different concerns in mind. However, this potential for multiple and varied readings is also problematic. The reader or listener is free to approach the martyr stories and search for whichever meanings they hope to discover. The meaning of martyrdom is subjective, personal, and shaped by individual concerns and desires. This would not be such a problem if the desires of the reader or listener were motivated by the pious search for truth. But this is not always the case. As Maureen Moran explains:

Martyrdom presents both a legitimate and an illicit spectacle. The broken body can be viewed as a means to spiritual triumph or a voyeuristic object appealing, at best, to erotic curiosity and, at worst, to perverse and violent desires [...]. This condition of scopophilia, “the eroticized desire to see,” on the part of spectators and readers, suggests that martyrdom texts are as much about visual inspection and sexual curiosity as about the moral lessons and higher spiritual truths which a silent body can, paradoxically, teach.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁶ Asterius, *Ekphrasis on the Holy Martyr Euphemia*, 4 (Dehandschutter: 176).

²⁹⁷ Margaret Miles, *Carnal Knowing: Female Nakedness and Religious Meaning in the Christian West* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 57.

²⁹⁸ Maureen Moran, ‘The Art of Looking Dangerously: Victorian Images of Martyrdom’, *Victorian Literature and Culture* (2004), 475-93, at 477, 482.

Moran's comments alert us to the fluidity of depictions of the martyrs. The motivation of the viewer, reader, or listener might be holy, but it might also be directed by erotic curiosity, or perverse and violent desires. Depending on the disposition of the person receiving the image, the naked body of a female martyr could easily be received, misunderstood, objectified, and, either consciously or unconsciously, used to arouse lust.

It is interesting that Moran comments on how the image of the female martyr can arouse 'erotic curiosity' or 'sexual curiosity'. As we have seen, the notion of *curiositas* influenced Augustine's depictions of the martyrs. But the notion of erotic or sexual curiosity extends beyond the sin of *curiositas* to include the sin of *voluptas carnis*. The image of the naked female martyr evokes what Moran refers to as 'an eroticized desire to see': a physical, bodily longing for the female object of the male gaze. For Augustine, this is a dangerous gaze, which not only diverts attention away from God, but also binds the male viewer together with the object of his vision in an adulterous relationship with the demure bride of Christ. If the curious attraction to the sight of a corpse provokes nightmares, how much more would erotic attraction to female martyrs provoke *phantasias* that haunt men at night? Augustine describes the power of erotic mental images:

Yet in my memory, of which I have spoken at length, sexual images survive, because they were imprinted there by former habit. While I am awake they suggest themselves feebly enough, but in dreams with power to arouse me not only to pleasurable sensations but even to consent, to something closely akin to the act they represent. So strongly does the illusory image in my mind affect my body that these unreal figments influence me in sleep in a way that the reality could never do while I am awake.²⁹⁹

Even when asleep, 'foul obscenities' and the 'bestial imagination' can lead to the pollution of the body.³⁰⁰ From this, we get the sense that the erotic desire to see the female martyr not only misuses and abuses the memory of the martyr, but the image might also impress itself upon the mind and tempt virtuous men in their sleep.

The image of the naked female martyr would have seemed all the more shocking in an environment where the female body was always covered. The containment of women in the private household, and the enclosure of consecrated

²⁹⁹ *conf.* 10.30,41 (WSA I/1: 264). Cf. s. 151.8 (WSA III/5: 46): 'Sometimes this lust presses so hard on holy people that it does to them when they are asleep what it cannot do when they are awake'.

³⁰⁰ *ibid.* 30,42 (264).

virgins away from the male gaze, would have further eroticised the exposed female body.³⁰¹ It is not difficult to imagine how an audience, which had become accustomed to sermons on proper female comportment and dress, would have been excited by the novelty of being permitted – even encouraged – to dwell on the thought of beautiful female martyrs. In the course of martyrdom narratives and homilies, the female martyr's body, usually covered up and hidden away, is revealed, uncensored and eroticised.

Moreover, the public exposure of the naked bodies of female martyrs would have had sexual connotations because of the frequent presentation of martyr festivals as alternatives to the spectacle performances of the theatre. The role of women in theatre performances was often associated with the gratification of erotic curiosity. So, John Chrysostom refers to 'those lavishly decked out women on stage', he describes the female dancer who acts like a harlot in 'her face, her roving eyes, her languid gaze, her curly hair, her smooth cheeks and kohl-rimmed eyes', and he condemns those men who run to the theatre to see naked women swimming in pools.³⁰² The Christian claim to possess the true and holy performances of the martyrs opened up the possibility of carrying over theatrical displays of erotic curiosity. At times, we cannot help but wonder whether some of the Church Fathers deliberately kept this association close to the surface of their sermons to attract and engage their listeners, and excite them in a controlled and regulated way.

Augustine's reluctance to depict the bodies of the female martyrs is further illuminated by his personal experience of North African martyr festivals. Although he enthusiastically supported the festivals as occasions for spiritual edification and moral encouragement, he condemned the way that the festivals were celebrated in North Africa. From the moment of his ordination in 391, Augustine was concerned to reform the North African cult of the martyrs to control the festivals by bringing

³⁰¹ See, for example, Augustine's rules for a female monastery at Hippo, *ep.* 211 (WSA II/4: 18-28), esp. 211.10 (23-24): 'In your walk, your posture, your habit, and all your movements, let there be nothing that might arouse the desire of anyone... when, even if the tongue is silent, immodest hearts send messages to each other by glances at each other and find delight in terms of concupiscence of the flesh from each other's passion, chastity itself flees from their manner of life, even if their bodies are untouched by any impure violation'. See also Blake Leyerle, 'John Chrysostom on the Gaze', *JECS*, 1 (1993), 159-74, esp. 164: 'The result of such enclosure was, predictably, to eroticize the female body... The secure investiture of sexuality within women's bodies allowed John [Chrysostom] to linger upon the threat posed to male chastity by the unexpected sight of merely a woman's bare arms'.

³⁰² Quoted in Leyerle (1993), 165. See also Alexandra Retzlaff, 'John Chrysostom's Sex Aquarium: Aquatic Metaphors for Theatre in *Homily 7 on Matthew*', *JECS*, 11 (2003), 195-207, esp. 199-200.

them in line with the more disciplined Milanese festivals.³⁰³ Martyr festivals had become a source of mockery and scandal in North Africa.³⁰⁴ But Augustine was not only concerned about external criticism. He had first-hand experience of how martyr vigils and festivals could become hotbeds of immorality:

I as a lad used to attend vigils when I was a student in this city, and I kept vigil like that, all mixed up together with women, who were subjected to the impudent advances of men, which no doubt on many occasions put the virtue of even chaste people at risk.³⁰⁵

Since his youth, the sexes had been separated at martyr festivals; men and women had to enter the Church or shrine by different entrances.³⁰⁶ But Augustine's frequent attempts to calm and control the festivals suggest that they were still occasions for heightened emotions. For some of his listening audience, as for the young Augustine, those emotions might lead to lust. Mental images of the beautiful and naked bodies of female martyrs would only add to the misguided sensuality and corporeality of the celebrations.

The absence of female nakedness in Augustine's depictions of the martyrs shows that voyeurism has no place in his interpretation of martyrdom. While other Church Fathers use erotic and suggestive images to awaken the emotions of their readers and listeners, Augustine carefully controls the emotions of his readers and listeners. Traditional conventions for depicting female martyrs would have concerned Augustine for two main reasons: first, the memory of naked female bodies had the potential to haunt the dreams of chaste and holy men; second, the combination of erotic and violent elements invited perverse and voyeuristic desires to abuse and misuse the memory of the martyrs. For these reasons, he effectively clothes his women martyrs by simply not referring to female nakedness. His silence censors the account to place the details "out of sight". By choosing exactly what he wanted his audience to see, he redirected his audience's attention away from the corporeality of the martyr's body and towards the spiritual sights that are seen with the eyes of the heart. For this method of representation, there are no exceptions to the rule.

³⁰³ *ep.* 22 (WSA II/1: 58-62); 29 (WSA II/1: 95-100). See Chapter One (*Martyr Festivals*), above.

³⁰⁴ *c. Faust.* 20.21 (WSA I/20: 278); *ep.* 17 (WSA II/1: 48-50).

³⁰⁵ *s.* 359B.5 (WSA III/11: 333).

³⁰⁶ *ibid.* (333-34).

iv. *Deleting the Speeches of the Martyrs*

The next method of depicting the martyrs concerns a common feature of martyr sermons: the lengthy, fabricated speeches that are reported to have been delivered by the martyr during his or her trial or torture.³⁰⁷ One of the main stylistic features of depictions of the martyrs in the late-fourth and early-fifth centuries was the inclusion of direct speech (*prosôpopoeia* or *êthopoiia*). As with *ekphrasis*, the construction of fictitious monologues and dialogues was one of the exercises of composition that was taught in the *progymnasmata*. At this stage, *prosôpopoeia* and *êthopoiia* were hardly distinguished. So, Theon describes *prosôpopoeia* as ‘the introduction of a person to whom words are attributed that are suitable to the speaker’.³⁰⁸ And Hermogenes describes *êthopoiia* as ‘an imitation of the character of a person supposed to be speaking’.³⁰⁹ The value of fictitious speech is similar to that of *ekphrasis*: it introduces vividness to elicit an emotional response. So, in a text attributed to John of Sardis, the author explains: ‘Ethopoeia (or speech in character) is suitable in all parts of a speech and especially in proofs; for it makes the language alive and moves the hearer to share the emotion of the speaker by presenting his character’.³¹⁰ This technique was particularly suited to depictions of the martyrs because, as Quintilian explains, it can put words into the mouths of the dead; it can bring the dead back to life.³¹¹ Furthermore, Quintilian’s discussion of *prosôpopoeia* as a technique that is used primarily in a judicial setting makes it relevant for depicting the martyrs, who are, of course, witnesses who bear testimony to truth.³¹²

The use of *prosôpopoeia* is frequent in Greek martyr homilies. John Chrysostom and the Cappadocian Fathers include fictitious dialogues between the martyrs and their persecutors, they allow their audiences to overhear conversations between the martyrs and members of their family, and they invent monologues that enable the martyrs to speak directly to the listening audience.³¹³ Similarly, in his poems, Prudentius inserts long and articulate speeches into the mouths of his

³⁰⁷ Leemans et al. (2003), 33-34.

³⁰⁸ Theon, *Exercises*, 8.115 (Kennedy: 47).

³⁰⁹ Hermogenes, *Preliminary Exercises*, 9.20 (Kennedy: 84).

³¹⁰ Ps.-John of Sardis, *Progymnasmata*, 11.194 (Kennedy: 213).

³¹¹ Quintilian, *On Teaching Oratory*, 9.2.31 (LCL 127: 51).

³¹² *ibid.* 6.1.25-26 (LCL 126: 31).

³¹³ Leemans et al. (2003), 33-34.

martyrs.³¹⁴ The inclusion of fictitious speech enlivened the martyr's story, imported a sense of humour, directly appealed to the emotions, and, most importantly, enabled preachers and authors to convey their own beliefs and concerns through the mouths of the martyrs.³¹⁵

But Augustine did not invent speeches for his martyrs. Although he does occasionally report short extracts of the martyrs' speeches from their martyrdom narratives (as we will see below), he does not create imaginary speeches for individual martyrs. Instead, he erases their words and renders them mute. This was a conscious decision. His classical education and expertise as a professor of rhetoric would have given him the ability to construct fictitious speeches for the martyrs. In fact, we know that he was particularly skilled in this area. In his *Confessions*, he recalls how he had won a competition for composing and delivering a fictitious speech for Juno in which she lamented her inability to prevent Aeneas from sailing to Italy.³¹⁶ If he had been able to do this for Juno, he would have been able to do it for his male and female martyrs.

But, while Augustine did not create fictitious speeches for individual martyrs, occasionally he did create fictitious dialogues for hypothetical situations in which a martyr is put to trial by a persecutor. Here he invents imaginary speeches for imaginary characters. So, for example, in one sermon he constructs a long dialogue between a persecutor and a martyr. Even an abridged extract allows us to see that the martyr's words are little more than a patchwork of scriptural quotations:

Now set before your eyes the contest engaged in by the martyrs. Here comes the opponent, he's forcing them to deny Christ... He promises riches and honours...

The faithful man, though, who was promised such things, despised them, and said, "Shall I, just for the sake of riches, deny Christ? ... I mean to say, he is the one *who became poor for our sakes, though he was rich, so that we might be enriched by his poverty* (2 Cor. 8:9). I mean to say, he's the one about whom again the apostle says, *in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden away* (Col. 2:30)... The things that the eye of the heart gazes on are better than what the eye of flesh can see. *For the things that can*

³¹⁴ For example, Prudentius, *Peristephanon*, 3 on Eulalia (LCL 398: 142-56); 5 on Vincent (LCL 398: 168-203); 10 on Romanus (LCL 398: 290-93). See also Chrysostom, *A Homily on Saint Romanus*, 8 (Mayer: 233-34).

³¹⁵ Leemans et al. (2003), 33-35.

³¹⁶ *conf.* 1.17,24 (WSA I/1: 57).

be seen are temporary, while the things that cannot be seen are eternal (2 Cor. 4:18)...

“You do not want”, he says, “to receive more ample gifts from me? If you do not deny Christ, I will take away what you have”.

“It is still against my superfluities that you are raging. *Like a sharp razor, you have practiced deceit* (Ps. 52:2). You shave off the hairs, you do not cut the skin... I used to do what Paul advised: *Command, he said, the rich of this world, command them not to think proudly of themselves, nor to place their hopes in the uncertainty of riches* (1 Tm. 6: 17-19)... *we brought nothing into this world, but neither can we take anything away. Having food and clothing, with that let us be content* (1 Tm. 6:7-8)”.³¹⁷

The imaginary dialogue continues, and the scriptural quotations become more pronounced as the persecutor’s threats are met by succinct extracts from the Bible:

But the persecutor says, “I can deprive you of food, I can deprive you of clothing”. They have come now to the struggle, the opponent has started raging more hotly; superfluities are over and done with, they have got down to the necessities.

Do not withdraw from me, since affliction is very close (Ps. 22:11)... *Who shall separate us from the charity of Christ?* (Rom. 8:35)...

Let the persecutor go one step further still, let him rage, and say, “If you do not care about your own people, I will remove you yourself from this light of day”.

From this light; surely not from the eternal light?... I, for the sake of this light, will not deny the light; *that was the true light* (Jn. 1:90). I know to whom I can say, *Since with you is the fountain of life, and in your light we shall see light* (Ps. 36:9). Take my life, take away the light; I will still have life, still have the light...

The martyr wins. Is there any greater contest, anything anywhere else, we ought to be spectators of? No.³¹⁸

Here Augustine “en-textualises” the martyr by making them embody, fulfil, and proclaim God’s Word. The same Spirit that speaks in the Scriptures also speaks in and through the martyrs to fulfil the gospel: ‘When they arrest you and deliver you up, do not wonder what to speak, or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given you at the time. It is not you who are speaking, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you’.³¹⁹ The authoritative words of Scripture fix the meaning of

³¹⁷ s. 299D.5 (WSA III/8: 258-60). Cf. s. 326.2 (WSA III/9: 171), 334.1 (WSA III/9: 204-05).

³¹⁸ *ibid.*

³¹⁹ *en. Ps.* 115.4 (WSA III/19: 329). Cf. *en. Ps.* 141.5 (WSA III/20: 330-31); s. 276.2 (WSA III/8: 30). The biblical text is Mt. 10:19-20.

martyrdom, colour the memory of the martyrdom event, and present the martyrs as instruments of God's self-revelation.

Similarly, while Augustine silences the words of individual martyrs, he replaces their own words with those of Scripture to make the martyrs proclaim the gospel and sing the psalms.³²⁰ So, he says of the martyr Vincent: 'When his flesh, which was a kind of tribute to the victorious Christ, was thrown into the sea from the boat, it silently said, *We are cast down, but not lost* (2 Cor. 4:9)'.³²¹ In another sermon, he explains that Vincent 'knew how to say, *In God I shall praise the word, in the Lord I shall praise the utterance; in God I shall hope, I shall not fear what man may do to me* (Ps. 56:10-11)... he knew to whom he should say, *My God, rescue me from the hand of the sinner, from the hand of the law-breaker and the wicked; since you are my patience* (Ps. 71:4-5)'.³²²

Also, the martyrs collectively proclaim the Bible with one shared voice: the voice of the Church crying out to its head. So, in one of his *Commentaries on the Psalms*, Augustine says: 'In this psalm, then, we hear the voice of people gravely troubled; and we must undoubtedly hear it as that of martyrs exposed to danger amid their sufferings, but fully confident in their head. Let us listen to them and from sympathetic hearts join our voice to theirs'.³²³ In this liturgical context, he urges his congregation to identify with the martyrs. He tells them that very same psalms that they have chanted in the mass are sung by the martyrs in the sermon.³²⁴ Through the act of singing the psalms, the congregation is brought together with the martyrs as one body. They sing the same words, pray the same prayers, are bound together with the same love, and hope for the same heavenly reward. The voice of the martyr becomes the voice of every Christian individual, or rather, the whole Christian community as one, from past to present to future:

³²⁰ For the martyrs proclaiming the gospel see *civ. Dei*, 18.50 (Dyson: 897-98); s. 318.1 (WSA III/9: 147).

³²¹ s. 274.1 (WSA III/8: 23).

³²² s. 277A.2 (WSA III/8: 48).

³²³ *en. Ps.* 69.1 (WSA III/17: 401). Cf. s. 331.5 (WSA III/9: 192), 333.1 (WSA III/9: 198), 334.1 (WSA III/9: 204), 335.2 (WSA III/9: 209), 335B.2, 4 (WSA III/9: 216, 218), 335C.5 (WSA III/9: 222).

³²⁴ For singing or chanting the Psalms, see *en. Ps.* 18(2).13 (WSA III/15: 211), 25(2).5 (WSA III/15, 261); s. 306.1 (WSA III/9: 17), 313B.1 (WSA III/9: 96), 329.1 (WSA III/9: 182).

In the psalm we hear the voices of jubilant singers... It is not as though these singers were strangers to us or as though our own voice were missing from this psalm. Listen to it as though you were hearing yourselves. Listen as though you were looking at your own reflection in the mirror of the scriptures... When in your own exultant hope you observe the likeness between yourself and other members of Christ, the members who first sung these verses, you will be certain that you are among his members, and you too will sing them... The holy martyrs have sung about it, for they have escaped [troubles] and are now exulting with Christ... Let us all sing the psalm together – both the saints who rejoice in the reality and we who join them in hope... Let us all sing together.³²⁵

Here he reaffirms the corporate nature of the Church as one body united in faith, hope, and love. He reminds his congregation that, when they are in communion with the martyrs, they share in the martyrs' blessings: 'Just as when one member suffers, the whole body suffers (1 Cor. 12:26), so the small are blessed with the great (Ps. 115:13)',³²⁶

While Augustine seems to silence the martyrs, he makes their voices more powerful and meaningful by putting the words of Scripture into their mouths. The *vox martyrum* becomes not only the *vox populi*, but also the *vox Dei*.

Exceptions: Lawrence, Fructuosus, and Donata

There are some exceptions to this rule. We have already seen how Augustine repeats the reported words of Lawrence.³²⁷ He also records the reported words of Fructuosus and Donata:

When someone spoke to him [Fructuosus], and asked him to keep him in mind and pray for him, he answered, "I have to pray for the Catholic Church, spread as it is from the east to the west"... "And I," he said, "am praying for the Catholic Church, spread as it is from east to west. Don't you, if you want me to pray for you, withdraw from the Church for which I am praying".³²⁸

Taught by this magisterial lesson, that most valiant woman [Donata] said, *Honour to Caesar, as Caesar; but reverence to God...* Honour, she said, to Caesar as Caesar.³²⁹

³²⁵ *en. Ps.* 123.3 (WSA III/20: 45).

³²⁶ See *s.* 280.6 (WSA III/8: 75).

³²⁷ *s.* 302.8 (WSA III/8: 304), 303.1 (WSA III/8: 313). See n. 244.

³²⁸ *s.* 273.2 (WSA III/8: 18; PL 38: 1249). Cf. *The Acts of Saint Fructuosus and Companions*, 3 (Ruinar: 266).

³²⁹ *s.* 299E.2 (WSA III/8: 265; MA I: 553). Cf. *The Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs*, 9 (Musurillo: 88). The biblical allusion is to Mk. 12:17; Mt. 22:21; Lk. 20:25.

These examples are illustrations of how Augustine did, on occasion, appeal to the reported words of the martyrs for different purposes: Lawrence's words have a moral lesson; Fructuosus's words are an anti-Donatist plea for unity; Donata's words are an allusion to Jesus's words. But, while these are exceptions, they are not equivalents of the long, fabricated speeches that the martyrs pronounce in Greek martyr homilies and Latin poetry.

Basil of Caesarea's description of the martyr Gordius helps us to put Augustine's martyrs in perspective. Having been sentenced to numerous tortures and torments, Gordius responds:

'Why are you hesitating?' he asked. 'Why have you stopped in your tracks? Let my body be mangled, let my limbs be pulled apart, let there be whatever torture you wish. Do no disparage my hope of happiness. The more you increase my punishments, the more you procure for me greater recompense. This is our contract with the Master. Instead of weals, which swell on the body, a bright garment will shine for us at the resurrection. Instead of disgrace there will be crowns; instead of prison, paradise; instead of being condemned with criminals, I will live with angels. Sow many seeds in me, so that I may reap many times more'.³³⁰

While at first Augustine's depictions of Lawrence, Fructuosus, and Donata might seem to give weight to the martyr's words, in comparison with Basil's depiction of Gordius, they reveal how Augustine avoided relating reported or imaginary speeches of the martyrs.

Another comparison can be made between Augustine and John Chrysostom. Here, speaking on behalf of all the martyrs as a group, Chrysostom makes the martyrs speak directly to the audience:

Look at us, at what tortures we have suffered. For what did we suffer, when we were condemned to death and found eternal life? We were held worthy of shedding our bodies for Christ's sake. Yet, if at this point we hadn't abandoned them for Christ's sake, a little later, even if we did not want to, we would have divorced them from temporary life. Even if they (sc. our bodies) had continued on and not achieved martyrdom, death, shared as it is by nature, would have attacked and destroyed them. And so we do not cease giving thanks to God, in that for the salvation of our souls he held us worthy of being content with death, which is utterly obligatory, and received from us in the form of a gift and with the greatest honour that which is necessarily obligatory.³³¹

³³⁰ Basil, *A Homily on the Martyr Gordius*, 5 (Allen: 63).

³³¹ Chrysostom, *A Homily on the Holy Martyrs*, 1 (Mayer: 119).

Chrysostom continues in this manner, making the martyrs speak to his audience in one collective voice, ending with a lesson for their listeners: ‘Therefore you too transfer your eye from the present to the future and you will catch not even a brief sensation of the tortures’.³³² Augustine has very similar messages to proclaim in his sermons on the martyrs. However, unlike Chrysostom, he does not create imaginary speeches for his martyrs to voice these messages.

v. *Abstracting the Martyrs’ Personal Names*

The final method of representation that Augustine used to depict the martyrs was to abstract and erase the martyrs’ personal names. We might expect that, after most of the details have been stripped away from the memory of the martyrs, Augustine would retain at least this final, personal element. Yet, we find that he takes advantage of every opportunity to delve into the hidden meanings and figurative significance of the martyrs’ names by creating puns that seem to abstract and dehumanise the martyrs.

Augustine seizes the martyrs’ names in a playful but serious manner. He explains that Vincent was victorious over the devil,³³³ Lawrence had been rewarded with a crown,³³⁴ and Cyprian radiated the fragrant smell of the Cypress tree.³³⁵ He describes Quadratus as “a squared man”, whose firm and unfaltering faith is a sign of the security and stability of eternal life: ‘Was not the martyr Quadratus perfect? What could be more perfect than the square? The sides are equal, from every direction there is equality of shape; whichever way you turn it, it is upstanding, it is not a ruin. What a beautiful name, indicating the future reality it is a figure of’.³³⁶ Likewise, the names of Primus, Victoria, and Perpetua indicate the eternal victory of life over death: ‘The first one was called Primus; the one before last was Victoria, at the very end came Perpetua. Oh, what a victory without fall, what an end without

³³² *ibid.*

³³³ To defeat or conquer: *vinco, vincere, vici, victus*. s. 274.1 (WSA III/8: 23).

³³⁴ Crowned (with laurel): *Laurentius, laurentia, laurentium*. s. 304.1 (WSA III/8: 316); 305A.4 (WSA III/8: 326-27).

³³⁵ s. 313C.2 (WSA III/9: 102).

³³⁶ s. 306B.3 (WSA III/9: 30). Squared (made square): *quadratus, quadrata, quadratum*. See also s. 306C.1-2 (WSA III/9: 36-37).

end! What, after all, is victory perpetual but victory without end?’³³⁷ Similarly, the names of Perpetua and Felicitas signify the everlasting happiness of eternal life: ‘Perpetua, of course, and Felicity are the names of two of them, but the reward of them all. The only reason, I mean, why all the martyrs toiled bravely for a time by suffering and confessing the faith in the struggle, was in order to enjoy perpetual felicity’.³³⁸ It is for this reason that the group of both male and female martyrs is celebrated by the names of the two women, Perpetua and Felicitas: ‘the names of both women were the same as the reward of all the martyrs. I mean to say, why do martyrs endure all that they do, if not in order to revel in perpetual felicity? So these women were called to do what everyone is called to do’.³³⁹ Here the details of each martyr’s life and death are subsumed within, and subordinated to, a grander concept of witness, which leaves little room for individual identity.

This word-play has caused some scholars, such as Joyce E. Salisbury, to question Augustine’s intentions. Commenting specifically on the puns on the names Perpetua and Felicitas, Salisbury says: ‘Once again, Augustine removed much of the women’s credit for their achievement, making their fame a function of the moral lesson given by their names... This repeated emphasis on the pun was out of character for the eloquent orator’.³⁴⁰ But, in fact, it was not out of character for Augustine. His educational background, career in rhetoric, biblical exegesis, and preaching experience shaped his mind towards perceiving and depicting the martyrs in this way.

Augustine’s education in the liberal arts required the regular study of etymology and the study of rare words and subject matter.³⁴¹ His rhetorical

³³⁷ s. 335A.1 (WSA III/9: 212; MA I: 221): *Primus vocabatur ante novissimum; Victoria in fine Perpetua. O victoria sine labe! O finis sine fine! Quid est enim victoria perpetua, nisi victoria sine fine?*

³³⁸ s. 282.1 (WSA III/8: 81; PL 38: 1285): *Perpetua quippe et Felicitas nomina duarum, sed merces est omnium. Neque enim omnes martyres in certamine passionis atque confessionis ad tempus fortiter laborarent, nisi ut perpetua felicitate gauderent.*

³³⁹ s. 281.3 (WSA III/8: 79; PL 38: 1285): *...Nam cur omnia martyres perferunt, nisi ut perpetua felicitate gloriantur?*

³⁴⁰ Salisbury (1997), 176. The suggestion that Augustine ‘removed much of the women’s credit for their achievement’ does not acknowledge his emphatic affirmation that martyrdom is never achieved by the individual, but it is always a divine gift that is achieved by God’s grace working within the martyr. For this reason, according to Augustine, no martyr – whether female or male – can receive ‘credit for their achievement’. All praise must be directed to God.

³⁴¹ George Howie, *Educational Theory and Practice in St. Augustine* (London; Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 254-55.

education is reflected in *On Christian Teaching*, especially book four, where he draws on Cicero's three principle aims of rhetoric: to instruct (*docere*), to delight (*delectare*), and to persuade (*movere* or *flectere*).³⁴² For the Christian preacher, the least important of these three aims was to delight. But, nevertheless, it was often necessary for the preacher to delight his audience to ensure that his message would be heard and that the lesson would be received and acted upon: 'A hearer must be delighted so that he can be gripped and made to listen, and moved so that he can be impelled to action'.³⁴³ Augustine's rhetorical education and career led him to explain and expose the truths revealed in the martyrs' names through a pleasing form of word-play. As van der Meer has pointed out, his puns on the names of the martyrs would have been popular and entertaining forms of preaching to attract the attention of his listeners to help them grasp the theological meaning of martyrdom:

Naturally it was his play on words, and not always the best examples of this, that won the most applause. After reading the *passio* of some martyrs Augustine pointed out in a sermon that Primus came first and Victoria Perpetua, the life without end, at the end. In these holy martyrdoms, he said, the will to live conquered the will to survive – and again the applause followed at once.³⁴⁴

However, Augustine's play on the names of the martyrs was not just a tactic for grasping the attention of his listening audience. Here we should not assume, with Brent D. Shaw, that Augustine indulged in the unnecessary repetition of tedious and meaningless puns: 'The sermon [s. 282] reinforces existing interpretations and adds little (except a banal pun, with which Augustine seems rather taken, given the number of times he repeats it)'.³⁴⁵

First, we must give serious consideration to the fact that the Bible – the starting point for all of Augustine's preaching – encouraged him to approach the names of the martyrs in this way. As Karla Bohmbach explains:

³⁴² *doc. Chr.* 4.12 (Green: 117).

³⁴³ *ibid.* (118).

³⁴⁴ van der Meer (1961), 429.

³⁴⁵ Brent D. Shaw, 'The Passion of Perpetua', *Past and Present*, 139 (1993), 3-45, at 41. See also Peter Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages: A Critical Study of Texts from Perpetua (d. 203) to Marguerite Porete (d. 1310)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 16: 'Where the writer of the *Acta minora* had played somewhat crudely upon Perpetua's names, Augustine and his disciple Quodvultdeus take the punning on 'perpetual felicity' to the point of tedium'.

In ancient Near Eastern literature generally, names often carry enormous significance, being inextricably connected to the very nature of that which is named. Hence, to know the name is to know something of the fundamental traits, nature, or destiny of the name's bearer. Names can provide insight into a person's character, social location, or future, or the way in which others perceive the person. In the Bible, the name often represents the very essence of a person.³⁴⁶

This is particularly true for female names: 'given the Bible's overall androcentrism (male-centeredness), attention to the seemingly small detail of a woman's name may provide key information about her characterization'.³⁴⁷ Augustine was not unaware of this fact. His belief that the Bible was divinely inspired by God led him to pay careful attention to every word in an attempt to discover hidden depths and meanings. And so, in *On Christian Teaching*, he explains that some words, such as names of people and places, have 'a figurative significance' and 'some hidden meaning' which help towards 'solving the mysteries of the scriptures'.³⁴⁸ Certainly, Augustine did not categorise martyr texts and traditions as Scripture, but his appreciation of the significance of names in the Bible influenced the way that he understood the names of the martyrs.

Second, we must pay attention to his perception of the martyrs as witnesses. Just as the word *martyr* indicates the martyr's status as a witness, so the martyr's personal name is a sign that points towards greater truths. As members of God's elect, the martyrs' names were divinely ordained to reveal what they were going to become, and what they were going to receive. So Augustine says of the martyr Quadratus:

He was already called Quadratus beforehand, and he had not yet been crowned; he had not yet been publicly subjected to the trials by which he would be squared off. And yet, when he was given the name it was being proclaimed that he had been *predestined before the foundation of the world*

³⁴⁶ Karla G. Bohmbach, 'Names and Naming in the Biblical World', in Carol Meyers, Toni Craven, and Ross S. Kraemer (eds.), *Women in Scripture: A Dictionary of Named and Unnamed Women in the Hebrew Bible, the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books, and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge; Eerdmans, 2000), 33-39, at 33.

³⁴⁷ *ibid.* 33.

³⁴⁸ *doc. Chr.* 2.16 (Green: 43-44). For examples of this theory in practice see, for example, *en. Ps.* 51.4 (WSA III/17:15), 59.9 (WSA III/17: 186-88): '*Gilead is mine*. We have read these names in God's scriptures. Gilead has its own meaning, and one fraught with mystery, for it is interpreted "heap of witness." And what a heap of witness there was in the martyrs! That accumulation of witness belongs to me, says the Church; the true martyrs are mine'.

(Rom. 8:30; Jn. 17:24); and in order to be called this, he experiences this in it, so that it might be fulfilled.³⁴⁹

Similarly, he says of Perpetua and Felicitas:

So it was by an ordination of divine providence that these women had to be, and were, not only martyrs, but also the closest companions, in order to set the seal of their glory on one single day, and to leave posterity with a joint festivity to celebrate. By the example, you see, of their glorious struggle they encourage us to imitate them; and likewise by their names they bear witness to the indivisible gift we are going to receive. May they hold on tight to each other, bind themselves together. We are not hoping for one without the other. Perpetual, after all, is not much good if there is no felicity there; and felicity fades away if it is not perpetual.³⁵⁰

Not only were the female martyrs' names appointed by God, but also, through divine providence, the two women were destined to be the closest friends. When their names are joined together, they bear testimony to the truth of eternal life, and encourage others to imitate the martyrs by reminding them of the reward. The belief that martyrs' names were divinely ordained – that they were predestined by God before the creation of the world – imbues them with deeper significance.

Third, we must realise that Augustine's etymological puns also served a mnemonic function that is similar to the puns on saints' names in Jacobus da Voragine's *The Golden Legend*. As Mary Carruthers observes: 'Such associative word play is the method of the game of charades. It is also the fundamental stuff of remembering'.³⁵¹ She continues: 'Voragine has given the preaching friars, the orators of his time, a very useful digest, *breviter* and *summatim*, of ethical subject-matter in memorable, inventive form: first in puns and rebuses, and then in summary narratives... What better mental fodder for a busy preacher, or a meditating lay person or cleric?'³⁵² Augustine's puns on the names of the martyrs are also 'the fundamental stuff of remembering'. They encapsulate complex theological ideas in pithy and memorable combinations of words that could be remembered even by those listeners with the very shortest of attention spans.

³⁴⁹ s. 306B.3 (WSA III/9: 30; MA I: 93).

³⁵⁰ s. 282.1 (WSA III/8: 81; PL 38: 1285).

³⁵¹ Carruthers (1998), 159.

³⁵² *ibid.*

When Augustine abstracted the martyrs' names by focusing on their hidden significance, he was not trying to dehumanise or trivialise the deaths of the martyrs by reverting to tiresome clichés or banal puns. Although he might appear to denigrate the martyrs by denying their importance as human beings, his intention was to amplify their importance by affirming their significance in the life of every Christian individual. He wanted to show how personal names were more than the expression of personal identity. He wanted to help his listeners to realise that the martyrs' names extend beyond the limits of time and place, and beyond individual persons and personality, to signify and support the journey of every Christian towards God.

What are the implications of this for Augustine's female martyrs? On many occasions he does not only abstract, but he even erases, the names of the female martyrs. So, for example, in one sermon on Agnes's feast, he does not name the female martyr, but refers to her only as a 'holy virgin'.³⁵³ Likewise, in two sermons delivered at festivals of the Martyrs of Scilli, he reports the words of Donata, but he refers to the female martyr only as 'the blessed daughter' of Lady Wisdom,³⁵⁴ and a 'most valiant woman'.³⁵⁵ The same can be said of Maxima, Donatilla, and Secunda,³⁵⁶ and Bernike, Prosdoke, and Domnina.³⁵⁷ Also, as we have seen, in *On the Care to be Taken for the Dead*, Augustine reflects on the Martyrs of Lyons, but he does not mention Blandina or any of the other (male and female) individuals in the group.

At this point, we might want to consider whether Augustine's decision to abstract or erase the names of the martyrs might be compared to his decision not to name certain central figures in his *Confessions*. For example, he does not name his school friend who died soon after being baptised, his brother who suddenly appears at Monica's death, his sister who was the abbess of a religious community of women, or his beloved partner and mother of Adeodatus.³⁵⁸ This extraordinary fact has been

³⁵³ s. 53.1 (WSA III/3: 66).

³⁵⁴ s. 37.23 (WSA III/2: 197).

³⁵⁵ s. 273.2 (WSA III/8: 18).

³⁵⁶ s. 345 (WSA III/10: 58-66).

³⁵⁷ *civ. Dei*, 1.26 (Dyson: 38-40).

³⁵⁸ It is interesting that Augustine does not mention his sister in the *Confessions*. Tradition has given her the name "Perpetua" (Kim Power, 'Family, Relatives', art., in Fitzgerald, [1999], 354). After her

discussed by Matthew Condon, who equates the erasure of names with a process of defacing memory and wilful forgetting:

In everyday practice, at least in modernity, the withholding of a name is often a tool of subtle indignation or even an undisguised sign of contempt for the other. There is no surer way to offend than to forget or pretend to forget a person's name. Doing so suggests more than simply that we find their names to be of little value – it also means that the persons themselves are deemed to be of little significance to us.³⁵⁹

But this is not the case for Augustine's martyrs. His failure to name the martyrs does not reflect wilful forgetting, deliberate devaluation, or the conscious denial of their significance. Upon first glance, we might be tempted to agree with Condon, and conclude that Augustine was embarking on a project of *damnatio memoriae*. But it is here that we find the key to his project of reforming the memory of the martyrs: a key that unlocks, and makes sense of, the five methods of representation that we have set out in this chapter. Augustine replaces the personal names of the martyrs with repeated explanations of the Greek word *martyr*, which translates into the Latin word *testis*.³⁶⁰ For Augustine, the word *martyr* evokes the judicial connotations of a witness who bears testimony to truth.³⁶¹ This judicial term is associated with torture, just as the witness is subjected to torture during interrogation in an attempt to discover the truth. Furthermore, the word *martyr* includes the notion of dying for a cause: 'the holy martyrs, not false but true witnesses, bore witness with their blood to their being another life infinitely to be preferred to this life'.³⁶² The martyr's unwavering witness, endurance of torture, and welcoming of death is seen as a revelation and a proof of the validity of the truth that is revealed.³⁶³ The whole value of martyrdom depends on this understanding of the martyr as a witness. Bearing this

death, her role as abbess in the female monastery was taken over by a certain Felicitas. It is intriguing that here we might have a case of both a Perpetua and a Felicitas. Perhaps this could suggest the popularity of the two female martyrs among North African ascetic women.

³⁵⁹ Matthew G. Condon, 'The Unnamed and the Defaced: The Limits of Rhetoric in Augustine's *Confessiones*', *JAAR*, 69 (2001), 43-64, at 58.

³⁶⁰ *en. Ps.* 118(9).2 (WSA III/19: 379), 118(14).3 (WSA III/19: 405); *s.* 286.1 (WSA III/8: 101).

³⁶¹ *en. Ps.* 118(9).2 (WSA III/19: 379), 118(14).3 (WSA III/19: 405); *s.* 286.1 (WSA III/8: 101). See further Lucy Grig, 'Torture and Truth in Late Antique Martyrology', *EME*, 2 (2002), 321-336, esp. 324-328.

³⁶² *s.* 299F.1 (WSA III/8: 271).

³⁶³ *s.* 328.2 (WSA III/9: 177).

in mind, it is not surprising to find that often Augustine chooses to refer to male or female martyrs simply as “the martyr(s)” rather than to specific, named individuals.

Conclusion: Abstraction or Erasure?

At the end of this chapter, we sense a tension arising from Augustine’s need and desire to remember the martyrs, but his reluctance to allow his listeners to form mental images of them. If the memory of the martyrs is too vivid or engaging, it becomes a useless and even dangerous memory, which leads the mind away from God, and results in a perverse and idolatrous pleasure. Considering the extent of Augustine’s deletion of detail, it is easier for us to discuss what he does not include in his depictions, rather than what he does include. This might give the impression that he wanted to remove all traces of the martyrs from the Church, and blot out their memory from the Christian mind. But, as we have seen, this is not the case. Augustine gave the martyrs a very special place in the Christian life: he encouraged his readers and listeners to pay attention to the martyrs; he emphasised their positive position and role in salvation history; he closely identified the martyrs with the inspired words of the Scriptures; he stressed their spiritual significance as witnesses to eternal truth. When Augustine seems to abstract the martyrs to the verge of erasure, he makes them all the more meaningful and useful to his audience. Augustine’s depictions of the martyrs remind us that the martyr is only ever a witness pointing to a truth which lies beyond, a thing that may be used but never enjoyed in and of itself, a means that must necessarily lead to an end, the object of our vision but never the focal point upon which our eyes should rest. Representations of the martyrs are extremely valuable and important, but only if we follow the martyrs’ line of vision and look to where they had set their sight.

Perhaps we can offer an analogy to help us to understand Augustine’s methods of depicting the martyrs: the artistic principle of “visual economy”. The basic aim of visual economy is to provide the most powerful communication of meaning with the minimal amount of detail. It is a principle that strives for simplicity. Anything that distracts or detracts from the intended meaning and desired response is omitted from the artwork. Our eyes are drawn to the most important elements, and our attention is directed towards the deeper meaning of the image. Augustine’s methods and aims for depicting the martyrs are similar to this artistic principle. His methods of abstraction and erasure reduce the martyrs to the bare

essentials, and emphasise only those details that direct our minds towards the spiritual message that is communicated through the martyrs.

Part Two

DEPICTING FEMALE MARTYRS

Introduction

GENDER DISTINCTION IN MARTYRDOM NARRATIVES

The exceptional presence of women among the early Christian martyrs, and the desire to record and remember their presence, led to issues of gender being brought to the fore as Christian men tried to confront, and make sense of, the intriguing and perplexing image of the female martyr.³⁶⁴ The fact that a martyr might also be a woman had the potential to affect the martyrdom event proper by prompting the different treatment of male and female martyrs during trial, torture, and death.³⁶⁵ It also affected the traditions that arose around the martyrdom event, as the female martyr's sex became central to her memory.

The authors and preachers of martyrdom narratives and sermons often force their readers and listeners to confront the femininity of the martyrs. So, for example, we are urged to imagine recent mothers standing naked before a crowd with their breasts still dripping milk;³⁶⁶ we look on as women willingly remove their clothes before voluntarily throwing themselves on fiery pyres;³⁶⁷ we are invited to imagine young women having their breasts torn with metal claws;³⁶⁸ we observe young girls being led to brothels, more afraid of the attacks of the *leno* than the *leo*;³⁶⁹ we are prompted to imagine the beauty of the female martyrs, as their persecutors and

³⁶⁴ For general studies on women among the martyrs, see Francine Cardman, 'The Acts of the Women Martyrs', *Anglican Theological Review*, 70 (1988), 144-50; Kate Cooper, 'The Voice of the Victim: Gender, Representation and Early Christian Martyrdom', *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester*, 80 (1998), 147-57; Stuart Hall, 'Women among the Early Martyrs', in Diana Wood (ed.), *Martyrs and Martyrologies*, SCH, vol. 30 (Oxford; Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1993), 1-21; E. Glenn Hinson, 'Women among the Martyrs', *SP*, 25 (1993), 423-28; Chris Jones, 'Women, Death, and the Law During the Christian Persecutions', in Wood (1993), 23-34; Johannes N. Vorster, 'The Blood of the Female Martyrs as the Sperm of the Early Church', *Religion and Theology*, 10 (2003), 66-99.

³⁶⁵ Cardman (1988).

³⁶⁶ *The Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas*, 20 (Musurillo: 129).

³⁶⁷ For Agathonice, see (Greek recension): *The Acts of Saints Carpus, Papyrus, and Agathonice* (Musurillo: 29); (Latin recension): *On April Thirteenth, the Commemoration of the Holy Martyrs, Bishop Carpus, the Deacon Pamphilus, and Agathonice*, 6 (Musurillo: 35).

³⁶⁸ Prudentius, *Peristephanon*, 3 (LCL 870: 151).

³⁶⁹ For Agnes, see Prudentius, *Peristephanon*, 14 (LCL 870: 339-41). For Irenê, see *The Martyrdom of Saints Agapê, Irenê, and Chionê*, 5-6 (Musurillo: 291). For Sabina, see *The Martyrdom of Pionius*, 7, 9 (Musurillo: 145-49). For the *leno-leo* association, see Tertullian, *Apology*, 50 (ANF 3: 55).

audiences lament the destruction of such physical charm;³⁷⁰ we watch as mothers encourage their sons to their deaths by bearing their breasts before them;³⁷¹ we are forced to imagine events in slow motion as boiling pitch is poured drop by drop onto naked female bodies;³⁷² we are invited to participate in the voyeuristic pleasure of young mothers offering their full breasts to the beasts.³⁷³ In all these cases, femininity and womanhood are not ignored, concealed, or taken for granted, but rather they are objectified, amplified, exaggerated, and made unavoidable. The reader or listener is challenged, even forced, to confront these martyrs specifically as *women* martyrs. Consequently, it is not just their faith that is exposed in their words, actions, and appearance, but also their sexualised female bodies.

As these examples suggest, the most marked difference between male and female martyrs is the description of nudity and physical beauty: an element that is almost absent from depictions of male martyrs.³⁷⁴ As Gillian Clark observes, such frequent representations could affect the way that an author might use, or an audience might respond to, images of women martyrs:

The narrative display of a tortured and exposed body, especially when that body is female, prompts further questions about the motives of writers and readers. The body of a chaste woman was normally concealed, and a female body on display marked that woman as sexually available. So, even though the sufferings of martyrs were not usually adapted to their gender, the public torture of a woman made a different impact from the torture of a man.³⁷⁵

³⁷⁰ For Crispina, see *The Martyrdom of Saint Crispina*, 3 (Musurillo: 307). For Agathonice, see *The Martyrdom of Saints Carpus, Papyrus, and Agathonice* (Musurillo: 35).

³⁷¹ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 15.4 (FC 107: 75), on the Maccabean Mother: 'She bared her breasts and reminded them [her sons] of the nurture they had given'. This is reminiscent of Homer's *Iliad*, 22.82-85, where Hecuba bears her breasts to her son, Hector, in an attempt to remind him of his filial duty, and prevent him from going into battle with Achilles. However, the Maccabean Mother's gesture encourages her sons towards their deaths. Gregory explains: 'she sought not to save them, but to hasten their martyrdom'.

³⁷² *The Martyrdom of Potamiaena and Basilides* (Musurillo: 133); Palladius, *Lausiac History*, 3.4 (Lowther Clarke: 50-51). Palladius's Potamiaena demands: 'order me to be let down gently into the cauldron that you may know what endurance Christ, whom you know not, bestows on me' (51).

³⁷³ Victricius of Rouen, *Praising the Saints* (G. Clark: 399).

³⁷⁴ See further Grig (2004), 82-83; Virginia Burrus, 'Word and Flesh: The Bodies and Sexuality of Ascetic Women in Christian Antiquity', *JFSR*, 10 (1994), 27-51; *eadem*, 'Reading Agnes: The Rhetoric of Gender in Ambrose and Prudentius', *JECs*, 3 (1995), 25-46.

³⁷⁵ Gillian Clark, 'Bodies and Blood: Late Antique Debate on Martyrdom, Virginity, and Resurrection', in Dominic Montserrat (ed.), *Changing Bodies, Changing Meanings: Studies on the Human Body in Antiquity* (London; New York: Routledge, 1998), 99-115, at 103. See also Miles (1991), 56-57.

And yet, as we have seen in Chapter Two, Augustine rejected this widely accepted and expected tradition of describing female nakedness. Instead, he effectively censors and silences martyrdom narratives by avoiding descriptions of the naked bodies of female martyrs. But this is not to say that he did not draw distinctions between male and female martyrs. Female nakedness might be the most noticeable difference that distinguishes male and female martyrs, but it is not the only one. Gender stereotypes and the rhetoric of gender also helped to shape, colour, and frame the way that Augustine saw, and encouraged others to see, the female martyrs.

As we now turn to explore Augustine's depictions of female martyrs, it is important to note that our focus on women is not an anachronistic projection of our own concerns onto the ancient sources. Sex and gender were just as much of an interest in late antiquity as they are in our present day.³⁷⁶ Indeed, questions of sexuality and gender were a specific concern for Augustine, whose commentaries on the Genesis creation narrative, and many of his other written works, display an interest in the relationship and distinction between the sexes.³⁷⁷ These reflections on sexual difference prompt us to anticipate that he would have perceived a difference between male martyrs and female martyrs. A brief summary of these reflections will provide us with some useful background.

Augustine believed that, while both men and women share in the *imago Dei* in their rational souls or interior being (*homo interior*), only men reflect the image in their bodies or exterior being (*homo exterior*).³⁷⁸ As human beings (*homines*), both

³⁷⁶ For an overview, see Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

³⁷⁷ See, for example, *Gn. litt.* 3.22.34, 9.1.1-19.36 (ACW 41: 98-99; ACW 42: 70-95); *Trin.* 12.1-13 (WSA I/5: 322-330); *conf.* 13.23,33 (WSA I/1: 366).

³⁷⁸ *Gn. litt.* 3.22.34 (ACW 41: 98-99); *c. Faust.* 24.2 (WSA I/20: 384); *Trin.* 12.3.10,12 (WSA I/5: 327-28, 329). For a clear account of Augustine's reflections on the differences between men and women, see Kari Elisabeth Børresen, *Subordination and Equivalence: The Nature and Role of Woman in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas* (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1982), esp. 1-45. The number of short studies on Augustine's views on women is daunting. I have made the decision not to refer to these studies in this introduction, except wherever strictly necessary. These studies include: Tarcisius J. van Bavel, 'Woman as the Image of God in Augustine's *De Trinitate* 12', in Zumkeller (1989), 267-88; *idem*, 'Augustine's View of Women', *Augustiniana*, 39 (1989), 5-53; Børresen (1994); *eadem*, 'In Defence of Augustine: How *Femina* is *Homo*', in B. Bruning, M. Lamberigts, and J. van Houtem, *Collectanea Augustiniana: Mélanges T. J. van Bavel* (Leuven: Peeters, 1990), 411-28; Gerald Bonner, 'Augustine's Attitude to Women and 'Amicitia'', in Cornelius Mayer and Karl Heinz Chelius (eds.), *Homo Spiritualis: Festgabe für Luc Verheijen OSA* (Würzburg: Augustinus, 1987), 259-75; Maryanne Cline Horowitz, 'The Image of God in Man: Is Woman Included?', *HTR*, 72 (1979), 175-206; Matter (2005); McGovan (1987), 255-64; Kim Power, *Veiled Desire: Augustine's Writing on Women* (London: Darton, Longman, and Todd, 1995), esp. 131-68;

men and women are equal, and both are the *imago Dei*. However, while men reflect the *imago* as *vir*i, women do not reflect the *imago* as *feminae*:

The woman with her husband is the image of God in such a way that the whole of that substance is one image, but when she is assigned her function of being an assistant, which is her concern alone, she is not the image of God; whereas in what concerns the man alone he is the image of God as fully and completely as when the woman is joined to him in one whole.³⁷⁹

While the *imago Dei* resides in the souls of all human beings, that image is found in the higher, masculine element of the soul that contemplates eternal truths, and not in the lower, feminine element of the soul that is concerned with temporal well-being:

The mind of man, being a form of rational life and precisely the part in which he is made to the image of God, is partly occupied with the contemplation of eternal truth and partly with the administration of temporal things, and thus it is made, in a sense, masculine and feminine, the masculine part as the planner, the feminine as the one that obeys. But it is not in this double function that the image of God is found, but rather in that part which is devoted to the contemplation of immutable truth.³⁸⁰

And so, men and women are equal in their possession of a rational soul. However, when speaking of the activities of the soul, the feminine is inferior, subordinate, and submissive to the masculine.

Augustine also believed that women are different from men because of the temporal distinction in the creation of their bodies. The formation of Eve from the side of Adam (Gen. 2:22) makes her dependent on Adam; the very reason for her creation is to become Adam's helper (*adiutorium*) (Gen. 1:28; 2:18).³⁸¹ And so, while men and women are equal with regard to the creation of their souls, the secondary creation of Eve illustrates how women are subordinate to men.³⁸²

Truax (1990); Judith Chelius Stark, 'Augustine on Women: In God's Image, but Less So', in *eadem* (2007), 215-41; Weaver and Laporte (1981).

³⁷⁹ *Trin.* 12.10 (WSA I/5: 328); *Gn. litt.* 3.22.34 (ACW 41: 98-99).

³⁸⁰ *Gn. litt.* 3.22.34 (ACW 41: 98-99); *Trin.* 12.10,12 (WSA I/5: 328, 329).

³⁸¹ *Gn. litt.* 9.3.5, 9.4.9, 9.7.12 (ACW 42: 73, 75, 77); *civ. Dei*, 12.24 (Dyson: 535). See also Børresen (1982), 31.

³⁸² Subordination is not the result of sin, but it is part of the order of creation. See *Gn. litt.* 11.37.50 (ACW 42: 171): 'we must believe that even before her sin woman had been made to be ruled by her husband and to be submissive and subject to him'.

When speaking allegorically, the distinction between male and female becomes more pronounced. So, for example, Augustine identifies the flesh with the feminine, but the soul with the masculine; the passions with the feminine, but reason with the masculine.³⁸³ This hierarchy of the sexes extends beyond the creation of the first human beings, and becomes a way of perceiving the world. The creation narrative justifies and explains the social order as natural and divinely ordained, just as the social order becomes a way of understanding the creation narrative.

And yet, it is important that we remember the viewpoint from which Augustine perceived women. Gerald Bonner reminds us that Augustine ‘was prepared to do what he could to improve this present, fallen world’, and so to improve the role and position of women in this world, but, ultimately, his ‘hopes were set elsewhere’.³⁸⁴ Bonner encourages us to take Augustine on his own terms, and to see that his views on women were part of his wider theological and eschatological concerns.³⁸⁵ He urges us to see that Augustine’s reflections on women are all inextricably linked to his understanding of salvation history.

For Augustine, sexual difference had its origins in the physical creation of Adam and Eve, it is evident in the historical events that are related in the holy Scriptures, and it can be seen in the present moment in the right order of the married couple, the individual household, and society as a whole. Sexual difference will remain even in the resurrected bodies of men and women in the anticipated communion of saints.³⁸⁶ There the bodies of women will be transformed to their perfect potential, and, although childbirth will not be needed, women’s sexual organs will be preserved and accommodated to a new, spiritual beauty.³⁸⁷ Just as with the wounds of the martyrs, what is wrongly considered to be a source of shame, infirmity, and corruption in this life, will become a visible source of praise and spiritual delight in the next.³⁸⁸

³⁸³ *Gn. adv. Man.* 2.11,15, 2.12 (WSA I/13: 81-83); *en. Ps.* 140.16 (WSA III/20: 316); *Trin.* 12.3 (WSA I/5: 323); *op.mon.* 32.40 (FC 16: 390-93). See further Børresen (1982), 32.

³⁸⁴ Gerald Bonner, ‘Review of Kim Power’s *Veiled Desire: Augustine’s Writing on Women*’, in *JTS*, 48 (1997b), 701-05, at 704-05.

³⁸⁵ *ibid.* 704.

³⁸⁶ *civ. Dei*, 22.17 (Dyson: 1144-46).

³⁸⁷ *ibid.* (1144-45).

³⁸⁸ *ibid.* 22.19-20 (1147-52).

Augustine's attitudes towards women were influenced by his scriptural exegesis, directed by the momentum of polemical debate, coloured by his reflections on the good of marriage, and shaped by his relationships with the women in his family and his congregations. Consequently, his attitudes towards women reveal a number of theological, anthropological, and moral tangles, knots, and loose ends. As Carol Harrison observes:

The question of woman's status, both before and after the fall, is a vexed one, not least because Augustine himself is far from being consistent on this point; so much of what he says seems to be determined by ulterior factors which, though they often contradict his own independent thinking, are unthinkingly reiterated and allowed to influence his work, with no attempt to reconcile, or even articulate, the resulting contradictions.³⁸⁹

But although his views on women are not tidy and coherent, they do reveal that a clear distinction between the sexes remained present in his mind. For Augustine, sexual differentiation is a permanent feature of human life. It came into being at the moment of creation in paradise, it remains in the present moment of this temporal world, and it will be retained in the eternal life of heaven. We can expect, then, that the distinction between the sexes would have been central to the way that Augustine perceived and depicted the female martyrs.

Brief Overview of Part Two

In the three remaining chapters we will see that it is not enough to locate Augustine's female martyrs in the context of the cult of the martyrs. We must also realise that femininity is a central feature of the portraits that he paints. Chapter Three is an extended introduction to Augustine's female martyrs. Here we consider how the process of depicting women (particularly biblical women) shaped and coloured his approach to the female martyrs. This chapter explores the notion of "thinking with women" to show how the female martyrs would have been particularly useful cognitive tools to help him to contemplate and articulate beliefs, ideas, and teachings. Then we turn to focus more closely on the depictions of female martyrs. Chapters Four and Five are meant to be complementary: the first focuses on theological ideas; the second focuses on moral instruction. So, in Chapter Four we explore how Augustine exaggerated the traditional stereotype of "womanly weakness" only to

³⁸⁹ Carol Harrison, *Christian Truth and Fractured Humanity*, Christian Theology in Context (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 169.

present the female martyrs as forceful communicators of theological messages. Then, in Chapter Five, we consider how he emphasised the femininity of the martyrs to depict them as accessible exemplars to be imitated by all Christian men and women.

Chapter 3

THINKING WITH WOMEN

In antiquity images of women populated the pages of epic poetry, young girls were sacrificed on the stages of Greek tragedies, honourable matrons and naked *hetairai* adorned Athenian vases, and Roman coins were impressed with images of empresses and female personifications of abstract virtues.³⁹⁰ While real women were more or less constrained to the private realm of the household, images of fictional, mythical, or notional women occupied the public imaginations of men. These images do not necessarily correspond with the reality of life for women at the time. The exact relationship between the representation of women in ancient sources, and the reality of the lives of actual women, is not straightforward. So, for example, depictions of Athena as the goddess of wisdom, images of the Fates writing on scrolls, or representations of the Muses as inspiration for poets do not allow us to draw concrete conclusions regarding the literary activities of real women in antiquity.³⁹¹ No textual genre or type of artefact is without its interpretive problems. Yet, the discrepancies between representation and reality often give added force to ancient depictions of women. As Loraux comments on the representation of virgins as sacrificial victims in Greek tragedy: ‘Of course, in real life the city did not sacrifice its young girls... There is much that could be said about this cathartic interplay of the imaginary, the forbidden, and the real; much too about the function of the theatre, that stage set up by the city for the tangling and untangling of actions that anywhere else it would be dangerous or intolerable even to think about’.³⁹² Rather than being direct reflections of the lives and experiences of real women, representations of women were used as mental images or cognitive tools that helped to release the reigns of the imagination. They assisted in the composition and contemplation of ideas, the articulation and

³⁹⁰ See, for example, Sarah Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York: Schocken, 1975, repr. 1995); Nicole Loraux, trans. Anthony Forster, *Tragic Ways of Killing a Woman* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987); Dyfri Williams, ‘Women on Athenian Vases: Problems of Interpretation’, in Averil Cameron and Amélie Kuhrt (eds.), *Images of Women in Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1983), 92-106. For an overview, see Gillian Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity: Pagan and Christian Lifestyles* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).

³⁹¹ For a brief discussion of the Fates in iconographical traditions see Jocelyn Penny Small, *Wax Tablets of the Mind: Cognitive Studies of Memory and Literacy in Classical Antiquity* (London; New York: Routledge, 1997), 77.

³⁹² Loraux (1987), 33.

expression of thought, the formation of individual and communal identity, and the prescription and enforcement of behavioural norms.

Drawing on a common cultural heritage, Christian men also used images of women “to think with”, but they adapted and expanded their repertoire of images to include those drawn from ancient Hebrew texts and early Christian literature.³⁹³ Moral, doctrinal, mystical, and polemical texts introduce us to the female figures of Lady Wisdom, the Mother Church, the soul as Bride, the Church as virgin, and heretical sects as adulteresses.³⁹⁴ Female personifications of abstract virtues were carried over to communicate specifically Christian messages. So Tertullian’s treatise *On Patience* (written around 200-203) presents us with a description of Lady Patience as God’s companion and handmaid;³⁹⁵ Methodius’s *Symposium* (composed between 270 and 290) is a handbook of Christian virtue, staged as a banquet in which ten female virgins take turns to deliver philosophical and exegetical discourses;³⁹⁶ Prudentius’s *Psychomachia* (written between 390 and 405) forms the first example of extended personification allegory, in which female personifications of virtues and vices take centre stage in a battle for the soul.³⁹⁷ Similarly, in his *Confessions* (397-401), Augustine reflects on his own conversion experience as a battle between the personified memory of his old loves, which pluck at the garment of his flesh, and the chaste but maternal figure of Lady Continence, who holds out her arms to welcome and embrace him.³⁹⁸ Likewise, in his *Soliloquies* (composed in 386-87), Augustine expresses his desire to ‘behold and to possess’ Lady Wisdom, ‘with purest gaze and

³⁹³ For the idea that women are “good to think with” (a statement attributed to Claude Levi-Strauss), see Elizabeth A. Clark, ‘Thinking with Women: The Uses and Appeal to ‘Woman’ in Pre-Nicene Christian Propaganda Literature’, in William Vernon Harris (ed.), *The Spread of Christianity in the First Four Centuries*, Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition, vol. 27 (Leiden; Boston, Brill, 2005), 43-51; Brown (1988), 153; David Hunter, ‘The Virgin, the Bride, and the Church: Reading Psalm 45 in Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine’, *CH*, 69 (2000), 281-303, at 282.

³⁹⁴ See, for example, Miller (2005), esp. 289-321.

³⁹⁵ Tertullian, *On Patience*, 15 (FC 40: 220-21).

³⁹⁶ Methodius, *The Symposium: A Treatise on Chastity* (ACW 27).

³⁹⁷ Prudentius, *Psychomachia* (LCL 387: 274-343). This date of composition may be later. See further Michael John Roberts, *Poetry and the Cult of the Martyrs: The Liber Peristephanon of Prudentius* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 2-3, n.7. For Prudentius’s female personifications, see S. Georgia Nugent, ‘Virtus or Virago? The Female Personifications of Prudentius’s *Psychomachia*’, in Colum Hourihane (ed.), *Virtue and Vice: The Personifications in the Index of Christian Art* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 13-28.

³⁹⁸ *conf.* 8.11,26 (WSA I/1: 204-05). For Augustine’s presentation of Lady Continence, see Stark (2007), 17-18.

embrace, with no veil between and, as it were, naked'.³⁹⁹ Even when Christian men refused to accept traditional images of women (for example, the numerous Roman goddesses that are rejected by Augustine in his *City of God*),⁴⁰⁰ these images were included in the late ancient education system and, therefore, would have been retained within the memories, and helped to shape the minds, of influential Christian men.⁴⁰¹ It is against this backdrop of a vast spectrum of images of women that the female martyrs would have been seen by Augustine and his congregations.

Representation and Reality

While we encounter many images of women through the writings of the Church Fathers, these images tell us more about their male authors than they tell us about the lives of real Christian women.⁴⁰² Because of this, we must listen to the advice of Sarah Pomeroy, and take care to 'distinguish the study of men's ideas and images of women from the study of historical women'.⁴⁰³ Similarly, we must pay attention to the words of Patricia Cox Miller, as she draws our attention to the distinction between real women and literary representations of women. In her sourcebook of Greek women's lives in early Christianity, Miller explains that, while some of our ancient sources do provide glimpses into the lives of real women, many of the women presented to us in male-authored texts are 'literary representations, rather than transparent windows through which to view history "as it really was"'.⁴⁰⁴ This may appear to be axiomatic when dealing with abstract female personifications. Nevertheless, it is something that must be remembered especially when we encounter

³⁹⁹ *sol.* 1.13.22 (FC 5: 372-73).

⁴⁰⁰ See, for example, *civ. Dei*, 4.11 (Dyson: 157-58).

⁴⁰¹ See, for example, *conf.* 1.13.20 (WSA I/1: 53) for Augustine's reflections on the impressionable story of Dido's suicide. The lasting impact of the story is reflected in the implicit comparison between Monica and Dido in *conf.* 5.8.15 (WSA I/1: 124). See further Eric J. Ziolkowski, 'St. Augustine: Aeneas' Antitype, Monica's Boy', *Literature and Theology*, 9:1 (1995), 1-23.

⁴⁰² The work of Elizabeth Clark is particularly noteworthy here. See E. Clark, 'Ideology, History, and the Construction of "Woman" in Late Ancient Christianity', *JECS*, 2 (1994), 155-84; *eadem*, 'Sex, Shame, and Rhetoric: En-gendering Early Christian Ethics', *JAAR*, 59 (1992), 221-45; *eadem*, 'The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the "Linguistic Turn"', *CH*, 67 (1998), 1-31; *eadem*, 'Women, Gender, and the Study of Christian History', *CH*, 70 (2001), 395-426; *eadem*, 'Early Christian Women: Sources and Interpretation', in Linda L. Coon, Katherine J. Haldane, and Elisabeth W. Sommer (eds.), *That Gentle Strength: Historical Perspectives on Women in Christianity* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990), 19-35.

⁴⁰³ Sarah Pomeroy, 'The Study of Women in Antiquity: Past, Present, and Future', *AJP*, 112 (1991), 263-68, at 265.

⁴⁰⁴ Miller (2005), 3.

descriptions of real women, which, upon first glance, do not appear to be created with rhetorical embellishments or a hidden agenda.

Even when we are dealing with real women, we must be aware of the rhetorical and literary nature of texts because, as Kate Cooper points out, ‘Roman male discourse about female power served more often than not as a rhetorical strategy within competition for power among males themselves... Narrative treatment of the actions or intentions of women did not straight-forwardly represent flesh-and-blood women themselves, but rather served to symbolize aspects of the tension to be found among men’.⁴⁰⁵ And so, for instance, when we come across Christian texts that make frequent reference to the prominence of women in heretical sects, we should not necessarily conclude that heretical groups attracted disproportionate numbers of women, but rather we should be aware that the image of the heretical woman could be employed as a polemical tool in the male power struggle to assert a self-proclaimed orthodoxy in response to opposing and competing groups.⁴⁰⁶ Even those contexts which appear to be more neutral still present women as they are seen through the lens of male perspective. One example of this is found in ancient medical texts, which are not overtly polemical, but neither are they entirely reliable as objective sources for women’s lives and experiences.⁴⁰⁷ To use the words of Dyfri Williams, our male-authored sources present us with ‘essentially a man’s view of a man’s point of view’.⁴⁰⁸

The distinction between representation and reality remains as we turn to early Christian depictions of heroic or exemplary women because there is a great chasm between depictions of the virtuous elite and the lives and experiences of the silent and unrepresented majority: the heterogeneous group of grandmothers, widows, wives, mothers, aunts, nieces, daughters, sisters, virgins, concubines, slaves, and

⁴⁰⁵ Kate Cooper, ‘Insinuations of Womanly Influence: An Aspect of the Christianization of the Roman Aristocracy’, *JRS*, 82 (1992), 150-164, at 150-51.

⁴⁰⁶ For background, see Virginia Burrus, ‘The Heretical Woman as Symbol in Alexander, Athanasius, Epiphanius, and Jerome’, *HTR*, 84 (1991), 229-48.

⁴⁰⁷ See, for example, A. E. Hanson, ‘The Medical Writers’ Woman’, in D. M. Halperin, J. J. Winkler, F. I. Zeitlin (eds.), *Before Sexuality: The Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 309-337; L. Dean-Jones ‘The Cultural Construct of the Female Body in Classical Greek Science’, in M. Golden and P. Toohey (eds.), *Sex and Difference in Ancient Greece and Rome*, Edinburgh Readings on the Ancient World (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), 183-201.

⁴⁰⁸ Williams (1993), 105.

prostitutes. And so, it is difficult to work back from representations of the elite minority to the experiences of the ordinary Christian woman. Indeed, representations of the virtuous elite are not impartial or detached descriptions, but they are constructed with particular purposes in mind. This is especially the case with the highly stylised depictions of women in the popular hagiographical *Lives* of the fourth and fifth centuries, such as Gregory of Nazianzus's funeral oration for his sister Gorgonia,⁴⁰⁹ and Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Saint Macrina*.⁴¹⁰

Turning to Augustine, we find that he presents his mother, Monica, in a similarly creative manner.⁴¹¹ On the surface, his descriptions of Monica might seem to offer us access to the lives and experiences of North African Christian women in the late fourth century, and, to a certain extent, this is true. But clearly Augustine's depictions of Monica are not objective representations. They are complex images that bear the marks of an intense relationship between mother and son. They reveal traces of the lasting memories of childhood and adolescence. They are produced with the retrospective hindsight of more than ten years between Monica's death in 387 and his writing of the *Confessions* as the Bishop of Hippo in 397-401. Augustine presents her as a paradigm of persistent prayer;⁴¹² an exemplar of how to accept moral correction with humility;⁴¹³ a paragon of Christian motherhood;⁴¹⁴ the model of a submissive wife;⁴¹⁵ an instrument in God's plan, endowed with the spiritual insights of dreams, visions, and prophecy;⁴¹⁶ a would-be martyr, standing

⁴⁰⁹ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 8* (Daley, 2006: 64-75).

⁴¹⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *Vita Sanctae Macrinae* (Corrigan: 1987). Wendy Elgersma Helleman, 'Cappadocian Macrina as Lady Wisdom', *SP*, 37 (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 86-102; Francine Cardman, 'Whose Life is it? The *Vita Macrinae* of Gregory of Nyssa', *SP*, 37 (2001), 33-50.

⁴¹¹ See further Elizabeth A. Clark, 'Rewriting Early Christian History: Augustine's Representation of Monica', in Jan Willem Drijvers and John W. Watt (eds.), *Portraits of Spiritual Authority: Religious Power in Early Christianity, Byzantium, and the Christian Orient* (Boston: Brill, 1999), 3-23; Felecia McDuffie, 'Augustine's Rhetoric of the Feminine in the *Confessions*: Woman as Mother, Woman as Other', in Stark (2007), 97-118; Rebecca Moore, 'O Mother, Where Art Thou? In Search of Saint Monnica', in Stark (2007), 147-66.

⁴¹² For example, *conf.* 3.11,19-3.12,21 (WSA I/1: 89-91), 5.9,16-17 (WSA I/1: 125-26), 6.1,1 (WSA I/1: 134-35), 6.13,23 (WSA I/1: 154).

⁴¹³ *conf.* 6.2,2 (WSA I/1: 135-37).

⁴¹⁴ Clarissa W. Atkinson, "'Your Servant, My Mother": The Figure of Saint Monica in the Ideology of Christian Motherhood', in Atkinson (1987), 139-72. Monica was not just a mother to Augustine and his siblings, but also to his friends at Cassaciacum: *conf.* 9.11,28 (WSA I/1: 230-31); *b. vita*, 1.6 (FC 5: 50).

⁴¹⁵ *conf.* 9.9,19 (WSA I/1: 224-25).

⁴¹⁶ *conf.* 3.11,19 (WSA I/1: 89-90), 6.1,1 (WSA I/1: 134), 6.13,23 (WSA I/1: 154).

among those who were ‘ready to die with their bishop’, Ambrose;⁴¹⁷ a woman who bears a resemblance to Perpetua and the Maccabean Mother;⁴¹⁸ an illustration of how the uneducated may contemplate truth and perceive wisdom;⁴¹⁹ the Mother Church;⁴²⁰ a Christ-like exemplar and mediator;⁴²¹ the new Venus and Dido;⁴²² a mother comparable to the Virgin Mary;⁴²³ a daughter of Eve.⁴²⁴

In addition to this, it is in a less expected context that we find a more personal defence of Monica. In Augustine’s *Unfinished Work in Answer to Julian* (*Contra Iulianum opus imperfectum*), within the context of a discussion of the meaning of death, to our surprise we encounter Julian’s deliberate misrepresentation of Augustine’s own presentation of Monica in his *Confessions*. In keeping with the invective tone of the work, Julian’s reported words from his *To Florus* accuse Monica of a ‘hidden disease’ of alcoholism, as he writes: ‘in the books of your *Confessions* you indicated that she was called – to use your word – a tippler’.⁴²⁵ This comment clearly concerned Augustine, as his response reveals not only the anticipated reaction of such a common shaming technique, and a personal slight against his own writings that had been taken out of context, but also a sense of filial duty to his long-deceased mother. Augustine responds:

⁴¹⁷ *conf.* 9.7,15 (WSA I/1: 220). While this might seem to be a bit of an exaggeration, Ambrose’s recollection of the event reveals that he was preparing himself for what may be his own martyrdom: Ambrose, *ep.* 20 (FC 26: 366-68, 373, 375).

⁴¹⁸ See further Salisbury (2004), 126-28.

⁴¹⁹ *conf.* 9.10,23-26 (WSA I/1: 226-29); *b. vita.* 2.8, 2.10, 2.11, 2.16, 3.19, 3.21, 4.27, 4.35 (FC 5: 53, 55-56, 58, 64, 67-69, 75-76, 84); *ord.* 1.11.31-33, 2.1.1, 2.17.45 (FC 5: 269-72, 273, 321-22). See also Atkinson (1987), 143; Catherine Conybeare, *The Irrational Augustine*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 63-138. Conybeare observes that recent scholarship tends to follow Augustine’s later, less positive, evaluation of Monica’s intellectual abilities rather than the ‘considerably more nuanced’ presentation of Monica in the works produced at Cassiciacum (64-65). In her overview of Monica’s role in *On the Happy Life*, Conybeare refers to Monica as ‘the interlocutor who is increasingly characterized as both the most destabilizing and the most creative influence in the dialogue’ (82).

⁴²⁰ Anne-Marie Bowery, ‘Monica: The Feminine Face of Christ’, in Stark (2007), 69-95, esp. 70, 74-76; Conybeare (2006), 66.

⁴²¹ Bowery (2007), esp. 80-87. Ziolkowski (1995), 7.

⁴²² Ziolkowski (1995), esp. 8-17; Power (1995), 84-85.

⁴²³ Power (1995), 91-92.

⁴²⁴ *conf.* 5.8,15 (WSA I/1: 124); *s.* 22.10 (WSA III/2: 47): ‘My own father who begot me was Adam for me, and my own mother was Eve for me’. See also Bonner (1997a), 30.

⁴²⁵ *c. Iul. imp.* 1.68 (WSA I/25: 96).

As for your idea that you should heap abuse upon my mother, who harmed you in no way and never said anything against you, you are overwhelmed by the desire to speak evil, and you do not fear the words of scripture: *Those who speak evil will not possess the kingdom of God* (1 Cor. 6:10). But why is it a surprise that you prove yourself her enemy as well, since you are an enemy of the grace of God by which I said that she was set free from her childish failing?⁴²⁶

Julian's unexpected comment provides an insight into Augustine's feelings towards his mother. Augustine is caught off-guard. His response gives the impression that he has been attacked in a weak and vulnerable spot, an emotional part of his life. But, with careful wording and seeming ease, he turns the attack around as a theological weapon to point at Julian, claiming that he had not experienced the grace that had changed Monica's life. This is a clear example of just how easily women could be used "to think with", especially within the context of the theological power struggles of Christian men.

While Monica is a complex example of Augustine's representations of women, we find that he was not always interested in representing real women. So, for example, he has little to say about his partner of thirteen years, even though he betrays a strong attachment to her. Likewise, he gives no more than a passing reference to his sister, who was a widow and the head of a community of Christian women.⁴²⁷ He does not seem to have shared such a close relationship with his sister as, for example, Ambrose and Marcellina, Gregory of Nyssa and Macrina, or Gregory of Nazianzus and Gorgonia.⁴²⁸ Also, it is only through Possidius that we come to know that Augustine had at least two nieces, 'who were also serving God'.⁴²⁹ And, unlike Jerome, Augustine did not dedicate any letters to his aunt.⁴³⁰

As we have seen in Chapter Two, representation is as much a matter of abstraction and erasure as it is a process of moulding and creating. The same can be seen in Augustine's representations of women, some of which are carefully constructed and complex images, while others are almost entirely erased, as they are

⁴²⁶ *ibid.* 1.3 (97).

⁴²⁷ *ep.* 211.4 (WSA II/4: 21). See also Possidius, *Life of Saint Augustine*, 26 (FC 15: 105).

⁴²⁸ Even Jerome reveals a greater involvement with his own unnamed sister, in his brief remarks in his *ep.* 6.2 and 7.4 (ACW 33/1: 40, 43-44).

⁴²⁹ Possidius, *Life of Saint Augustine*, 26 (FC 15: 105).

⁴³⁰ For Jerome's (reproachful) letter to his aunt Castorina, see his *ep.* 13 (ACW 33/1: 57-58).

deliberately or subconsciously pushed into the vast abyss of the forgotten past. The images of women that result from Augustine's process of representation are just that: images. They are personal and subjective; they are translated, interpreted, and endowed with meaning; they are welcoming and inviting, yet their apparent accessibility is deceptive. In fact, we find that the question posed by Francine Cardman in her study of Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Macrina* can be extended to all descriptions of women in early Christianity: 'with Gregory controlling the sources and shaping the image, what of her reality is accessible to those who know her only through the *Life*?'.⁴³¹

Uncovering Real Women?

Whether they are illustrations of conceptual notions, embodiments of abstract virtues, or stylised depictions of family members, images of women influenced the ways that female martyrs were perceived, depicted, and received. Women martyrs were, for the most part, historical figures, but they were lifted out of the confines of history, and used to contemplate and articulate eternal truths. Of course, the emphasis on gender in accounts of male martyrdom was also used to express and explain truth.⁴³² But femininity conveyed different meanings. This is comparable to how recent studies draw our attention to the fact that female personifications of abstract virtues are not simply a 'grammatical accident' derived from the gender of the noun, but the female image deliberately adds depth to the meaning that is conveyed through the image.⁴³³ So, within the context of her study of Monica, Clarissa Atkinson remarks on the uniqueness of representations of women:

⁴³¹ Francine Cardman, 'Whose Life is it? The *Vitae Macrinae* of Gregory of Nyssa', *SP*, 37 (2001), 33-50, at 34.

⁴³² Although masculinity was considered to be normative in Late Antiquity, masculinity or manliness was not fixed and stable, but complex and multifaceted. For this observation in relation to the male martyrs, see Catherine Conybeare, 'The Ambiguous Laughter of Laurence', *JECs*, 10 (2002), 175-202. Lawrence is compared with the women who wept at the foot of Christ's cross, and to Venus (while the persecutor is presented as Vulcan). Conybeare explains: 'Beyond being merely ambiguous, as he prepares for his martyrdom Laurence is gendered female' (192).

⁴³³ For this observation in relation to Prudentius's *Psychomachia*, see Nugent (2000), 13: 'For the most part, the anomalous introduction of women on the field of battle has been explained (or explained away) by linguistic constraint. Since the grammatical gender of abstract nouns in Latin is feminine, the argument goes, their representation as female characters was unavoidable... but the fact that the combatants in this [text] battle for the generic – and therefore unmarked, male – soul are female is not a mere grammatical accident. Rather, it can be shown throughout that gender is strongly embedded in the overall conception of the work – and therefore the Christian psychology that it presents – as well as in the narrative shaping of the individual battles'.

‘Historical personages fulfil the needs and expectations of different ages, changing as times change... the phenomenon is especially marked when the symbol is female, perhaps because women (even living women) are so often the objects of male fantasy’.⁴³⁴ The image of a woman – at once intriguing but dangerous, exciting but threatening – appealed to the male imagination in ways that images of men could not. Indeed, the image of a woman (*mulier*) – evoking associated ideas of women as physically and psychologically soft, malleable, and pliant (*mollis*) – lent itself to the male process of mental moulding and manipulation. Because of this, images of women could be used for a variety of purposes: they could be extracted from history, and played with in the mind; they could become both catalysts and mediums for contemplation; they could be recast and refashioned to embody and communicate ideas and beliefs.

The notion of “thinking with” women is extremely useful for this present study because it encapsulates the questions of *how* and *why* Augustine depicts female martyrs. Here the emphasis is not on whether his depictions are historically accurate reflections of the women martyrs, or how we might peel back the layers of imaginative depiction to discover the historical kernel of truth contained deep within. Rather, our attention is directed towards the process of representation, through which the historical women martyrs are not only resuscitated and revived, but also transformed. Their new forms – vivified by the breath of their male authors – are raised up into a totally different world. With each instance of representation, the image of the female martyr is extracted from the historical martyrdom event, and becomes fixed in the moment of depiction. She resists our attempts to resituate her back within her original, historical context.

Consequently, if we were to approach depictions of female martyrs in an attempt to rediscover lost women, retell their stories, or reclaim their voices, we would be faced with a very difficult task fraught with obstacles. Images of female martyrs, depicted through the mouths and the pens of their male authors, are distorted by so many factors that it is almost impossible for us to clarify and restore those images to reflect their original condition.⁴³⁵ Apart from issues of male authorship,

⁴³⁴ Atkinson (1987), 164.

⁴³⁵ This comment is intended to relate to depictions of female martyrs in particular, rather than all depictions of Christian women. Recent studies, particularly on Augustine’s letters to women, shed more positive light on our access to the lives of real Christian women. See Catherine Conybeare,

authorial intent, the rhetoric of texts, literary and narrative technique, the audience's expectations, common gender stereotypes, and stock imagery, we also have the added baggage of bringing our own expectations and assumptions to the images of the martyrs.

This observation has led some scholars to affirm that we can no longer harbour optimistic hopes to uncover "real women" or hear "real female voices" simply by looking at male representations of Christian women.⁴³⁶ But this is not to say that enquiry into depictions of female martyrs is fruitless. Augustine's depictions of female martyrs are not mere reflections of reality, empty pictures of historical characters, or sterile remnants of a bygone era. Rather, they are fertile and constructive images that inform, shape, and generate reality: they are not only reflective, but also projective. While the historical women martyrs seem to vanish from our sight, we can redirect our attention away from trying to reconstruct the historical lives, actions, and words of real women, and towards the importance of the female martyrs *as constructed* by their male authors. By approaching depictions of the martyrs as if they were historical sources that can provide information about actual women martyrs, we misunderstand the representations by looking in the wrong direction, as it were. Images of martyrs are not final products. They should not be thought of as dead ends that force us to turn back and search for their origins, but as signposts or springboards that impel us to continue looking forwards and moving onwards. It is even more helpful to think of representations of martyrs as tools that are constructed by a craftsman with the specific intention that they might be used to create other objects. To focus exclusively on the martyrs is to lose sight of the larger project for which they themselves were created: the moral and spiritual edification of the Christian community. By appreciating the fact that images of the martyrs are at once *constructed* and *constructive*, we find that, while the depictions might not readily supply many accurate details concerning the historical women

'Spaces Between Letters: Augustine's Correspondence with Women', in Linda Olson and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton (eds.), *Voices in Dialogue: Reading Women in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005) 57-72; Tilley (2005), 40-62; Joanne McWilliam (2007), 189-202.

⁴³⁶ E. Clark (1998), 15. My own opinion is closest to that of Francine Cardman (2001), 43n.16: 'I do not suppose that a historical reconstruction [of Macrina] is possible, and I readily admit that Gregory's account is a literary construction. But I am not willing to concede that all literary constructions are necessarily or wholly fictions lacking in relationship to historical reality'.

martyrs, they do provide information about the imaginative worlds of the early Church and, therefore, information about how Christians understood themselves, their past, their place in society, their role in the real world, and their hopes and anticipations for the future life. As Margaret Miles observes in her study of nakedness in Christian history: ‘representations do not merely *reflect* social practices and attitudes so that analysis of representation simply reveals the prejudices or stereotypes of a society. They also re-present, reinforce, perpetuate, produce, and reproduce them’.⁴³⁷

Women in the Bible

A helpful parallel for understanding how Augustine used female martyrs “to think with” can be found in his reflections on biblical women. Just as we cannot fully appreciate Augustine’s depictions of female martyrs without considering his male martyrs, so we cannot fully understand his reasons for depicting women martyrs without looking at how he represents other women, such as those in the Bible. And yet, despite current trends investigating the Church Fathers’ use of women “to think with”, and the importance of scriptural interpretation for the formation of Christian identity,⁴³⁸ Augustine’s representations of biblical women have all but escaped scholarly attention.⁴³⁹ This is remarkable, especially considering that he mentions so many biblical women in the course of his writings and sermons: Eve, Rebecca, Sarah, Hagar, Job’s wife, Lot’s wife, Susanna, Esther, Tobit’s wife (Anna), the Virgin Mary, Anna, Elizabeth, Mary and Martha, and Mary Magdalene. In addition to this, Augustine comments on the many unnamed women who feature in the course of Jesus’s life, are mentioned in his parables, or are found in the hypothetical

⁴³⁷ Miles (1991), 11.

⁴³⁸ For example, Tilley (1990), 383-97; Hunter (2000), 282: ‘Christian biblical interpretation, for example, is now mined for evidence of the way in which texts were deployed as rhetorical strategies for creating and maintaining symbolic worlds, which in turn sustained actual social and religious communities’.

⁴³⁹ This statement is qualified by scholarship on Augustine’s reflections on Eve and the Virgin Mary. Noteworthy studies include: Gerald Bonner, ‘The Figure of Eve in Augustine’s Theology’, in *SP*, 33 (1997a), 22-34; Pauline Allen, ‘Augustine’s Commentaries on the Old Testament: A Mariological Perspective’, in Hagit Amirav and Bas ter Haar Romeny (eds.), *From Rome to Constantinople: Studies in Honour of Averil Cameron*, Late Antique History and Religion (Leuven; Dudley, MA: Peeters, 2007), 137-51; *eadem*, ‘The International Mariology Project: A Case-Study of Augustine’s Letters’, *VigChr.* 60 (2006), 209-230; Maureen A. Tilley, ‘Mary in Roman Africa: Evidence for her Cultus’, *SP*, 40 (2006), 121-25. Also, for Mary Magdalene, see George Lawless, “‘*Infirmior sexus... fortior affectus*’: Augustine’s *Io.ev.tr.* 121.1-3: Mary Magdalene’, in *AugStud.* 34 (2003), 107-18.

situations constructed by the Sadducees: the Canaanite woman, the woman with a haemorrhage, the woman with the lost drachma, the woman with seven husbands, the woman taken in adultery, the woman who anointed the feet of Jesus, and the Samaritan woman at the well.

The fact that Augustine's images of biblical women have escaped the scholarly attention that they deserve might be explained by the problematic correlation between representation and reality. It is perhaps for this same reason that studies of Augustine's attitudes towards women tend to focus on the "real" women in his life (Monica, the mother of Adeodatus, and the female recipients of his letters) rather than his depictions of female martyrs. However, Augustine's diverse range of portraits of biblical women provides us with under-utilised and thought-provoking material that can help us to understand how he tried to influence and shape the lives of his congregations by presenting them with depictions of women. More specifically for this present study, Augustine's depictions of biblical women help us to reflect on his "logic of representation", that is, the underlying motivation and reasoning that guided, shaped, and determined his depictions of female martyrs.

Seen through the lens of a figurative interpretation of Scripture, Augustine endowed historical events with deeper meaning: he perceived the women in the Bible as individuals whose words, actions, and lives have a more profound, symbolic value.⁴⁴⁰ The lives of the biblical women are presented as small fragments of a larger narrative in which the individual events and stories are re-played throughout history. The best example of this is the story of Eve as the temptress and deceiver of Adam (Gen. 3:6-13), which is repeated in the depiction of Job's wife as the seducer of her husband (Job 2:9).⁴⁴¹ Augustine reads the story of Job through the lens of the Genesis narrative. He explains that Job's wife did not act as a comforter for her husband during his suffering, but rather she served as the devil's accomplice

⁴⁴⁰ Augustine's acknowledges the literal, historical existence of the women, as well as their figurative and prophetic significance, see *Gn. litt.* 8.4.8 (ACW 42: 38): 'Sarah and Hagar signify the two testaments, yet they were two women who actually existed... [T]hese events signified something other than what they were, but none the less they themselves existed in the world of material reality'.

⁴⁴¹ For Job's wife, see, for example, *s.* 15A.7 (WSA III/1: 337), 22A.3 (WSA III/2: 53), 81.2 (WSA III/3: 359), 343.10 (WSA III/10: 47), 359A.6 (WSA III/10: 214), 397.3 (WSA III/10: 438), 398.10 (WSA III/10: 451); *en. Ps.* 29(2).7 (WSA III/15: 306), 30(4).12 (WSA III/15: 356-57), 47.9 (WSA III/16: 345), 70(1).16 (WSA III/17: 428), 90(1).2 (WSA III/18: 317), 93.19 (WSA III/18: 396), 97.6 (WSA III/18: 462), 133.2 (WSA III/20: 188-89).

(*adiutrix diaboli*),⁴⁴² a daughter of the night,⁴⁴³ and a second Eve.⁴⁴⁴ In fact, she is so closely aligned with Eve that the two characters become conflated: ‘And then Eve made bold to tempt him, “Curse God, and die”’.⁴⁴⁵ Although Job is presented as a second Adam (‘stinking though he was, Adam fended off Eve’),⁴⁴⁶ he is also distanced from Adam, as he refused to take the devil’s bait.⁴⁴⁷ But the image of Job’s wife cannot be seen apart from the image of Eve, which is superimposed into the story to produce a double exposure.

Augustine also uses the image of Job’s wife (and, implicitly, the inseparable image of Eve) to shape the character of Tobit’s wife, Anna (Tob. 2:14). In one of his commentaries on the Psalms, Augustine says: ‘Job’s wife was seeking to harm him when she suggested, “*Curse God, and die*”. So was Tobit’s wife, who challenged her husband, “*What good have all your righteous deeds done you?*”. She said it to stir him to discontent with God for making him blind’.⁴⁴⁸ And so the story of Eve endures, repeating itself throughout history, binding together women by their unknowing imitation of Eve’s seductive words.

For Augustine, this recurring story is not confined to ancient history, but it is also seen in the more recent past: in the words and actions of those women who, during times of persecution, tried to persuade their husbands away from martyrdom. In a sermon on the subject of honouring and disregarding parents, Augustine speaks a word of caution directly to the men in his congregation, warning them of women who try to tempt men away from Christ: ‘Beware of Eve; she is not in this instance your better half, but the serpent’s agent. You were foolish enough to listen to her voice the first time... The serpent, you see, is not doing anything very grand; it is not

⁴⁴² *en. Ps.* 30(4).12 (WSA III/15: 357; PL 36: 0255), 90(1).2 (WSA III/18: 317; PL 37: 1151), 93.19 (WSA III/18: 396; PL 37: 1207).

⁴⁴³ *en. Ps.* 70(1).16 (WSA III/17: 428; PL 36: 0886): *vere filia noctis!* (in reference to Job singing God’s praise throughout all the day and all the night).

⁴⁴⁴ *en. Ps.* 93.19 (WSA III/18: 396; PL 37: 1207): *Accessit ad Job illa, tanquam Eva... Et ille iam cognoscens Evam.*

⁴⁴⁵ *en. Ps.* 133.2 (WSA III/20: 188; PL 37: 1738): *Tunc Eva ausa est eum tentare: Dic aliquid in Deum tuum, et morere.*

⁴⁴⁶ *en. Ps.* 133.2 (WSA III/20: 188; PL 37: 1738): *Adam putris repulit Evam.*

⁴⁴⁷ *en. Ps.* 97.6 (WSA III/18: 462; PL 37: 1255): *illa Eva erat, iam ille Adam non erat.* See also *s.* 343.10 (WSA III/10:47; PL 39: 1511): *Evam dimisit; sed Adam ille non fuit.*

⁴⁴⁸ *en. Ps.* 70(1).14 (WSA III/17: 426). See also *s.* 88.15 (WSA III/3: 429).

a tremendous effort he is making through Eve'.⁴⁴⁹ In fact, the story of Eve is repeated in any instance where a woman tries to tempt or seduce men away from God. So Augustine writes to Laetus, an African layman who left a monastery to be with his mother following the death of his father, and he admonishes him concerning his mother:

Why does she hold you like someone trapped in a net? [...] The heavenly trumpet calls you, a soldier of Christ, to battle, and your mother holds you back... Watch out that she does not twist and overturn you for the worse. What difference does it make whether it is in a wife or in a mother, provided that we nonetheless avoid Eve in any woman? [...] And whatever she offers you in those words and in that suggestion supposedly as a duty of love, in order to turn you aside from the most genuine and pure love of the gospel, comes from the cunning of the serpent.⁴⁵⁰

But the story is reversed with the figure of the Virgin Mary. Her role in the Incarnation allows her to recapitulate Eve, succeeding where the first woman had failed: 'if our first fall occurred when the woman conceived the serpent's poison in her heart, small wonder that our salvation was achieved when a woman conceived the flesh of the Almighty in her womb. Each sex had fallen, each was to be restored. It was through a woman that we were cast into destruction, through a woman that salvation was restored to us'.⁴⁵¹ The image of Mary provides women with an alternative figure to Eve, with whom they can identify. In a sermon preached on Christmas day, Augustine proclaims: 'Let men rejoice, let women rejoice. Christ has been born, a man; he has been born of a woman; and each sex has been honoured. Now, therefore, let everyone, having been condemned in the first man, pass over to the second. It was a woman who sold us death; a woman who bore us life'.⁴⁵² Mary becomes the new Eve. She gives hope to those women who try to reproduce her story within their own lives.⁴⁵³

Mary's story also continues to recur and resurface in the stories of faithful Christian women. For example, Augustine comments on those women who were the

⁴⁴⁹ *s.* 159A.7 (WSA III/11: 139).

⁴⁵⁰ *ep.* 243.4, 6, 10 (WSA II/4: 166, 167, 169).

⁴⁵¹ *s.* 289.2 (WSA III/8: 120).

⁴⁵² *s.* 184.2 (WSA III/6: 18).

⁴⁵³ *agon.* 2.24 (FC 2: 339): 'there is a profound mystery that, as death had befallen us through a woman, life should be born to us through a woman... The freeing of both sexes would not have been so severe a penalty for the Devil, unless we were also liberated by the agency of both sexes'.

first to witness Christ's resurrection: 'Because mankind fell through the female sex, mankind was restored through the female sex; because a virgin gave birth to Christ, a woman [Mary Magdalene] proclaimed that he had risen again. Through woman death, through woman life'.⁴⁵⁴ More closely identified with Mary than with Eve, these women adopt a similar pattern of life to Mary by trusting in God, and confessing their faith in Christ:

Why was it a woman who announced the gospel? Because it was by a woman that death was perfected. Indeed, the woman who announced death was consoled by the woman who announced life, because she had died as she administered death. It was by a woman that Adam was seduced, and so lapsed into death; it was by a woman that Christ was proclaimed, now rising again to die no more.⁴⁵⁵

These few examples alert us to the fact that, when looking at Augustine's representations of biblical women, we do not perceive individual women in solitary isolation, but rather we find that each representation is set against a wider background of other women's lives and stories. Whenever Augustine describes a particular woman, images of other women remain at the front of his mind. Comparisons, contrasts, confections, and allusions all contribute to colour and frame each representation. From this, we begin to realise that, whether Augustine paints portraits of biblical women, real women like Laetus's mother, or even the female martyrs, his representations of women should be read and interpreted alongside his wider reflections on the position of women in the course of salvation history.

Biblical Women as Exemplars

As Augustine's representations of women are intricately linked to one another, investigations into his treatment of biblical women can shed light on his depictions of female martyrs. This is particularly useful for helping us to understand how he used images of women to function within the Christian community. While there are some differences between Augustine's depictions of biblical women and female martyrs, there are also many similarities. Both his representations of biblical women and

⁴⁵⁴ s. 232.2 (WSA III/7: 25; PL 38: 1108): *Per feminam mors, per feminam vita*. See also s. 299L.1 (WSA III/6: 312).

⁴⁵⁵ s. 45.5 (WSA III/2: 255). Cf. s. 159B.10 (WSA III/11: 156): 'because death was prepared for the man by the serpent through the agency of the woman, it was through the agency of women that life was announced to men; because it was women who first saw the Lord rising again, and announced it to men, to the apostles'. For Mary Magdalene, see *ep. Io.* 121.1-4 (FC 92: 56-60).

those of his female martyrs were created with theological and ecclesiological concerns in mind. Moreover, both were created with moral and pastoral intentions: to provide guidance, instruction, and support to his congregations. The pastoral functions of Augustine's depictions of female martyrs are not always straightforward – exactly how a Christian mother might take Perpetua as a role model is not immediately clear – but usually his representations of biblical women have a more obvious and straightforward pastoral function. By looking at the logic behind Augustine's representations of biblical women, we may learn more about the pastoral functions of his depictions of female martyrs.

One of the main pastoral functions of Augustine's representations of biblical women is that of exemplarity. The wide range of female lives presented in the Bible provided Augustine with a number of exemplary role models that were to be imitated quite literally in daily life, as well as a number of negative examples that were to be rejected and avoided. Most often the exemplarity of imitable figures is straightforward and it leaves little room for misinterpretation. The female exemplar is held up as a model or patron, sometimes for a distinct group of people who are linked with the exemplar through their lifestyle choices or other circumstances. And so each of the three forms of the Christian life is given its own exemplar or representative: Susanna or Elizabeth for married women, Anna for widows, and the Virgin Mary for celibate women: 'Think about Susanna if you are married, about Anna if you are widows, about Mary if you are virgins'.⁴⁵⁶ By representing the three kinds of life, these exemplars give hope to all women.⁴⁵⁷ The ways in which women might imitate these archetypal figures is not spelt out, but neither is it difficult to decipher: Susanna and Elizabeth are to be imitated in their roles as faithful and obedient wives; Anna is to be imitated in her chaste and prayerful life as a *univira* and a widow; the Virgin Mary must be imitated in her pure virginity of body and soul.⁴⁵⁸ In this way, Augustine used the stories of biblical women to give practical advice to the women in his congregation. So he says of Susanna: 'We have heard the

⁴⁵⁶ *s.* 391.6 (WSA III/10: 419). See also *s.* 96.10 (WSA III/4: 34), 192.2 (WSA III/6: 47), 196.2 (WSA III/9: 61), 370.2 (WSA III/10: 308); *b. conjug.* 8 (WSA I/9: 40), 35 (WSA I/9: 58); *b. vid.* 16,20 (WSA I/9: 126); *ep.* 262.9 (WSA II/4: 207).

⁴⁵⁷ *s.* 196.2 (WSA III/6: 61; PL 38: 1020).

⁴⁵⁸ For Anna as a chaste widow, see *b. vid.* 13,16 (WSA I/9: 123-24). For her constant prayer, see *ep.* 130.29 to Proba (WSA II/2: 198).

reading about Susanna. May married chastity be built up by it, and laid on such a firm foundation, and fenced about with such a wall, that it can both repel intruders, and convict false witnesses. [...] Religious married women have here their edifying example, have something to imitate'.⁴⁵⁹ Likewise, the Canaanite woman is held up as a paragon of motherhood for other mothers to imitate: 'This Canaanite woman, whom the gospel reading has just introduced to us, offers us an example of humility, and a model of parental devotion'.⁴⁶⁰

Of course, these role models can be misused, as was the case with Ecdicia, who had taken a vow of continence. Despite being a married woman, she expressed her fervour by assuming the traditional clothing associated with widowhood, and thus presenting herself as a metaphorical widow.⁴⁶¹ In his letter to Ecdicia, written at around 418, Augustine has a lot to say on this matter, particularly concerning the personal slight towards her husband, the seriousness of her disobedience towards him, and the ultimate consequences of her actions for his salvation.⁴⁶² He also defines appropriate role models for the married woman. He explains that, while Scripture does not prescribe one certain type of dress for a wife and another for a widow, she should have requested the permission of her husband before changing her attire. Ecdicia's clothing is more than external; it is a statement of identity. Augustine says to her: 'If he [the husband] would not allow this at all, what would be lost to your desire? Heaven forbid that you would have displeased God because you did not dress like Anna, since your husband was not yet dead, but like Susanna'.⁴⁶³ In a manner that seems to stand out from the typical exhortations of Fathers such as Tertullian, Augustine continues to explain to Ecdicia that she should not be so concerned to give up her fine clothing, in imitation of Anna, but rather she should look to the example of Esther, who, although garbed in the finest royal fabrics, did not become proud, even though she was married to a man who did not share her fear of God.⁴⁶⁴ The overall message is that, while Ecdicia's intentions are to be admired,

⁴⁵⁹ s. 343.1, 5 (WSA III/10: 39, 43).

⁴⁶⁰ s. 77.1 (WSA III/3: 317).

⁴⁶¹ ep. 262.4, 9, 10 (WSA II/4: 205, 207).

⁴⁶² For ep. 262, see Claudia Kock, 'Augustine's Letter to Ecdicia: A New Reading', in *AugStud.* 31 (2000), 173-80; Tilley (2005), esp. 51-53; Conybeare (2005), esp. 66-67.

⁴⁶³ ep. 262.9 (WSA II/4: 207).

⁴⁶⁴ *ibid.* 10 (208).

ultimately she must be subject to her husband, just as Sarah was obedient to Abraham.⁴⁶⁵

In the appendix to her study of Augustine's letters to women, Catherine Conybeare observes that he 'makes few concessions of language for his female correspondents'.⁴⁶⁶ But, she continues, 'it is clear that Augustine takes particular pains to suit his choice of scriptural citations to a female reader... So too for personal *exempla*: not only does he choose biblical women, but he matches them as far as possible with his correspondent's situation'.⁴⁶⁷ More often than not Augustine's scheme of exemplarity is sexually consonant. Biblical women are held up as exemplars for other Christian women to imitate. So, for example, Augustine presents Susanna as an exemplar for women, and Joseph as an exemplar for men. In one sermon he says to his listeners: 'If scripture bears witness to such a great woman, does that mean it has abandoned men (*viros deseruit*)? Has it really permitted them to be without a model to imitate?'.⁴⁶⁸ Here Augustine appears to be saying that a woman cannot serve as a model for men, even when the female exemplar is as great a woman (*femina tanta*) as Susanna. This sentiment seems to gain weight as he presents Joseph as a role model for the men in his audience: 'So I was saying about the men, that they have not been left without a model either... pay attention to Joseph'.⁴⁶⁹ Likewise, in another sermon, Augustine says: 'You all know how Susanna struggled against sin to the point of shedding her blood. But so that it should not only be women who can draw comfort from this, and that men too look to one of their own number (*de numero suo*) for the same sort of example as Susanna gave, you all know how Joseph struggled against sin to the point of shedding his blood'.⁴⁷⁰ Susanna provides encouragement to the women only. Men must search for a male equivalent to serve as an exemplar.

Similarly, in a sermon preached on Christmas day, Augustine provides both a male and a female exemplar for each of the three ways of life: Mary and Christ

⁴⁶⁵ *ibid.* 7 (206).

⁴⁶⁶ Conybeare (2005), 67.

⁴⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁴⁶⁸ *s.* 343.5 (WSA III/10: 43; PL 39: 1508).

⁴⁶⁹ *ibid.* 6 (44).

⁴⁷⁰ *s.* 318.2 (WSA III/9: 148; PL 38: 1439).

represent virginity, Elizabeth and Zechariah represent marital fidelity, and Anna and Simeon represent chaste widowhood.⁴⁷¹ A similar correlation of men with male exemplars and women with female exemplars is found in Augustine's linking of Christ with men, and Mary with women: 'Men! Do not despise yourselves; the Son of God assumed manhood. Women! Do not despise yourselves; the Son of God was born of a woman'.⁴⁷² The Incarnation should encourage both sexes. Men are to identify themselves with Christ's manhood, and women are to be comforted by Mary's virginity and motherhood.

And yet, Augustine frequently extends his images of biblical women to speak to all people in his congregation. In one of the most extraordinary cases of this, he urges his listeners – both women and men – to imitate the Virgin Mary so that, through their virginity of mind, and by spreading the Word of God, they, too, may become mothers of God:

Just as Mary gave birth in her womb as a virgin to Christ, so let the members of Christ give birth in their minds, and in this way you will be the mothers of Christ... You became children, become mothers too... Bring whomever you can along to the bath of baptism, so that just as you became children when you were born, you may likewise be able, by bringing others along to be born, to become mothers of Christ as well.⁴⁷³

Here Mary's femininity is central to her function as an exemplar. Augustine's listeners are encouraged to identify with her role as mother, but this does not prevent her example from being used by men. The female role of mother is presented as being applicable to men. This reflects Augustine's use of maternal imagery when describing Jesus as a hen who loves and protects her chicks by becoming weak.⁴⁷⁴

More frequently Augustine uses biblical women to speak to a wider audience by presenting them as paragons, or embodiments, of virtue: the Canaanite woman embodies humility and persistent prayer,⁴⁷⁵ Mary Magdalene symbolizes the constant searching for Christ,⁴⁷⁶ Susanna exemplifies how to weigh up temporal safety with

⁴⁷¹ s. 370.4 (WSA III/10: 310). See the translator's comments on the authenticity of this sermon (WSA III/10: 311n.1).

⁴⁷² *agon.* 12 (FC 2: 329).

⁴⁷³ s. 72A.8 (WSA III/3: 289).

⁴⁷⁴ *en. Ps.* 58(1).10 (WSA III/17: 156), 90(1).5 (WSA III/18: 319); *Io. ev. tr.* 15.7(1) (FC 79: 81-82).

⁴⁷⁵ s. 77.1, 9-11 (WSA III/3: 317, 321-23), 77A.1 (WSA III/3: 327), 77B.1 (WSA III/3: 332).

⁴⁷⁶ s. 229L.1-2 (WSA III/6: 312).

eternal life,⁴⁷⁷ and the woman with a haemorrhage represents a faith so strong that she is compared with the Church of the martyrs: ‘What a splendid touch, what belief, what insistence! And this is what a woman did, worn out with loss of blood, like the Church afflicted and wounded in its martyrs by the shedding of their blood, but full of the strength of faith’.⁴⁷⁸

Also appealing to a wider audience of both women and men, Augustine uses images of biblical women to represent or personify the holy pilgrimage and spiritual struggle of every Christian. So, for example, the present life and the future life are personified in Martha and Mary respectively: ‘In Martha was to be found the image of things present, in Mary that of things to come. The kind that Martha was leading, that is where we are; the kind Mary was leading, that is what we are hoping for’.⁴⁷⁹ The image of Mary sitting at the feet of Jesus, intent upon hearing his words, is depicted as a foreshadowing of the eternal rest and joy of the saints in the life to come: ‘she was representing that life, not yet possessing it’.⁴⁸⁰ While the life represented by Martha is not wicked (both Mary and Martha were innocent and praiseworthy), Augustine urges his audience to identify with Mary and focus on eternal, rather than temporal, happiness. And yet, even Martha provides a good example for the congregation: ‘These things will pass; they are to be tolerated, not loved. If you want to fill Martha’s role in them, let it be with modesty, with compassion; modesty in your behaviour, compassion in your generosity’.⁴⁸¹ Augustine’s treatment of Mary and Martha is particularly interesting because, while it is often noted that he associated the female with the lower activity of the soul that is attached to temporal things (*scientia*), and the male with the higher function of the

⁴⁷⁷ s. 318.2 (WSA III/9: 148-49), 343.4 (WSA III/10: 43).

⁴⁷⁸ s. 375C.6 (WSA III/10: 343). See also s. 62.5 (WSA III/3: 158), 63A.2-3 (WSA III/3: 177-78), 63B.1-2 (WSA III/3: 180-81), 77.8 (WSA III/3: 321). The woman with a haemorrhage and Mary Magdalene are often discussed together, united by the notion of touch (the woman in the crowd touches Jesus; Mary Magdalene is told ‘Do not touch me’). See, for example, *Io. ev. tr.* 26.3(1-2) (FC 79: 261-62). For Augustine’s attempt to explain the difficult command, ‘Do not touch me’, see *ep. Io.* 121.3 (FC 92: 58-60). Augustine tries to reconcile Jesus’s words to Mary – *Noli me tangere!* – with the fact that Jesus allowed his disciples to touch his wounds. He explains that this was not because Mary was a woman. This positive defence of femininity could be explored further, and incorporated into our knowledge of his attitudes towards women.

⁴⁷⁹ s. 104.4 (WSA III/4: 83). See also *Trin.* 1.3.20 (WSA I/5: 79-80); *b. conjug.* 8 (WSA I/9: 40); s. 103.3-6 (WSA III/4: 77-79), 104.1-7 (WSA III/4: 81-86), 255.2-6 (WSA III/7: 158-62).

⁴⁸⁰ s. 255.5 (WSA III/7: 161); *Trin.* 1.3.20 (WSA I/5: 79-80).

⁴⁸¹ s. 104.7 (WSA III/4: 86).

soul that contemplates eternal truths (*sapientia*), here, in his discussion of Martha and Mary, the female is associated with both the higher and lower functions of the soul.⁴⁸²

The story of the woman bent double is also extended to relate to the whole Church community. All Christians struggle to be straightened up and detached from earthly things so that they can lift up their hearts to heaven: ‘That soul, you see, is bowed down which is pressed down by earthly cares, that soul is bowed down which is overloaded with desire for things, that soul is bowed down which falsely claims that it has lifted its heart to the Lord’.⁴⁸³ All human beings are in this state, as a result of sin,⁴⁸⁴ but, like the woman bent double, they can be straightened up with the grace of Christ: ‘The whole human race was held bent double under the devil, the whole human race was weighed down by earthly lusts; then one came with the promise of the kingdom of heaven’.⁴⁸⁵ The image of the woman bent double gives hope to those in Augustine’s congregation:

Any who are bent double, your gaze fixed on the earth, content with earthly well-being, thinking this is the only life in which you can be happy, not believing in any other; any of you as crookedly bent as that, straighten yourselves up. If you cannot do it on your own, call upon God. I mean, did that woman straighten herself up? Alas for her, if he had not stretched out his hand!⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸² For Augustine’s distinction of the higher, contemplative element of the soul from the lower, active element of the soul, see *c. Faust.* 22.27 (WSA I/20: 317); *op. mon.* 32.40 (FC 16: 392-93). For a similar signification to that of Mary and Martha, see Augustine’s description of Rachel and Leah, in *c. Faust.* 22.52 (WSA I/20: 333-34): Leah (whose name, he assures us, means *labouring*) represents ‘the temporal life in which we labour’, while Rachel (whose name means ‘*principle seen*’, or ‘*word by which the principle is seen*’) represents the eternal contemplation of God and the understanding of truth.

⁴⁸³ *s.* 110A.6 (WSA III/11: 98). For the woman bent double see also 162B (WSA III/5: 167); *en. Ps.* 37.10 (WSA III/16: 153), 68(2).8 (WSA III/17: 391); *Trin.* 4.2.7 (WSA I/5: 158); *ep.* 131 (WSA II/2: 200). Compare with *en. Ps.* 50.15 (WSA III/16: 423): ‘Another psalm laments: *They bent my soul down* (Ps 56:7). When a person lies down amid earthly desire he is in a sense bent over, but when he stretches upward to heavenly things his heart becomes upright’. See also *Trin.* 12.1 (WSA I/5: 322): ‘In all these things the only way that we differ from animals is that we are upright, not horizontal, in posture. This is a reminder to us from him who made us that in our better part, that is our consciousness, we should not be like the beasts we differ from in our upright posture’.

⁴⁸⁴ *s.* 375B.5 (WSA III/10: 334): ‘this is roughly how the Lord our God, our saviour, addresses us, saying, “Men, I made man upright, and he has made himself crooked”. See also *Gn. litt.* 6.12.22 (ACW 41: 193-94).

⁴⁸⁵ *s.* 110A.6 (WSA III/11: 98-99).

⁴⁸⁶ *s.* 110.5 (WSA III/4: 139).

But Augustine's biblical women are not always exemplary figures. While the woman bent double signifies the lifting up of the heart on the journey to eternal life, Lot's wife (Gen. 19:26) signifies a turning away from, or turning back on, the path of God. The figure of Lot's wife represents failure to make progress in this life, or the breaking of religious vows.⁴⁸⁷ Augustine uses the image of her looking back on the destruction of Sodom to instruct his audience on how they value temporal things and how they live their lives. He repeats Jesus's words, 'Remember Lot's wife!' (Lk. 17:32), which also alludes to the following verse of the gospel, 'Those who try to make their life secure will lose it, but those who lose their life will keep it' (Lk. 17:33).⁴⁸⁸ In this way he uses the image of Lot's wife as a deterrent, and warns his listeners against the hindrances of temporal things on their journey towards eternal life. Lot's wife provides an example for edification: 'The example of her misfortune redounds to your advantage, if you are careful'.⁴⁸⁹ He explains: 'she was made an example for your sake, so that you may take courage and not linger tastelessly on the road. Look at the woman who did dally there, and pass by. Be mindful of her who looked back, and make sure that you are stretching out to what lies ahead'.⁴⁹⁰

While the figure of Lot's wife provides a message for the whole Christian community, in one of his *Commentaries on the Psalms*, Augustine uses her specifically to instruct the women in his congregation:

Lot's wife is a lesson for us all. Suppose a married woman has desired to commit adultery: she has looked back from the place she has reached. Or a widow who had vowed to remain in that state desired to marry; what she desired was something legitimate for a bride, but not for her, because she looked back from her own place. Or a virgin has become a nun and is already consecrated to God... If she turns her eyes towards marriage, she is not condemned because she wants to marry, but because she had already gone beyond that, and becomes a Lot's wife by looking back (*fit uxor Lot respiciendo retrorsum*).⁴⁹¹

⁴⁸⁷ For Lot's wife, see, for example, *en. Ps.* 36(3).14 (WSA III/16: 141), 69.9 (WSA III/17: 411), 75.16 (WSA III/18: 68-69), 83.3 (WSA III/18: 187-88); *s.* 96.10 (WSA III/4: 34), 105.7 (WSA III/4: 91); *c. Faust.* 22.41 (WSA I/20: 326); *civ. Dei*, 10.8, 16.30 (Dyson: 402, 743).

⁴⁸⁸ For example, *en. Ps.* 75.16 (WSA III/18: 69; PL 36: 0968); *Mementote uxoris Lot!*

⁴⁸⁹ *en. Ps.* 83.3 (WSA III/18: 187).

⁴⁹⁰ *en. Ps.* 69.9 (WSA III/17: 411); *s.* 105.7 (WSA III/4: 91).

⁴⁹¹ *en. Ps.* 75.16 (WSA III/18: 69; PL 36: 0968).

Here Augustine uses the representation of a biblical woman to speak to all Christians ('Lot's wife is a lesson *for us all*'), and yet he draws out a specific meaning only for the women in his congregations. He says that Lot's wife has a message that is relevant for all people (*ad omnes pertinet*), but, even then, his following comments focus on women alone: the married woman (*maritata mulier*), the widow (*vidua*), and the chaste virgin (*virgo castimonialis*).⁴⁹² Despite the seemingly high levels of infidelity among the married men in his congregation,⁴⁹³ despite his admonition of unchaste widowers,⁴⁹⁴ and despite his concerns about clergymen who break the vows of the common life,⁴⁹⁵ Augustine does not compare such men to Lot's wife.

One final point might be made on the subject of Augustine's use of biblical women as exemplars. In many of his depictions of biblical women, the female figures acknowledge their sinfulness, or they approach Christ with humility. Themes of repentance and humility recur throughout the representations: the Canaanite woman accepts Jesus's comparison of her with a dog, the woman taken in adultery acknowledges that she has sinned, Mary sits humbly at the feet of Jesus, and the sinful woman who anoints Jesus's feet is repentant. These are not perfect or sinless women. Seen within the context of the Pelagian debate, we find that Augustine's representations of biblical women provide realistic exemplars for the Christian community. In his anti-Pelagian treatise, *On Nature and Grace* (*De natura et gratia*), Augustine attacks Pelagius's use of biblical figures – including women – to demonstrate the possibility of sinlessness:

⁴⁹² *ibid.*

⁴⁹³ For example, *s.* 9.3 (WSA III/1: 261): 'You are told, *You shall not commit adultery* (Ex. 20:14), that is, do not go to any other woman except your wife. But what *you* do is demand this duty *from* your wife, while declining to pay this duty *to* your wife'. See also the sermon delivered to married couples in *c.* 420, *s.* 392.2 (WSA III/10: 421), which does address women, but is concerned mostly with the adultery of men. On a related note, Augustine suggests that men find it more difficult to fulfil a vow of marriage or celibacy: Augustine's *ep.* 127 is addressed to Armentarius and Paulina, a married couple who recently had made a vow of married chastity. In this letter Augustine seems more concerned about Armentarius's ability to keep the vow, saying: 'If continence is a virtue, as it is, why is the weaker sex more ready for it, though virtue seems rather to have taken its name from "man" [*vir*], as the likeness of their sounds indicate? As a man, then, do not shrink from a virtue that a woman is ready to practice' (WSA II/2: 174).

⁴⁹⁴ *ep.* 259 to Cornelius (who may be his earlier patron, Romanianus) (WSA II/4: 197-99). After his faithful wife, Cypriana, had died, Cornelius sought to console himself by having relations with numerous prostitutes.

⁴⁹⁵ On the controversy arising over the death and inheritance of the priest Januarius, see *s.* 355 (WSA III/10: 165-170). For a reference to those monks who abandon the common life see *en. Ps.* 99.12 (WSA III/19: 24).

Next our author [Pelagius] mentions those “who, as scripture reports, not only did not sin, but lived righteously: Abel, Enoch, Melchizedek, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph...” He also includes women: “Deborah, Anna the mother of Samuel, Judith, Esther, another Anna the daughter of Phanuel, Elizabeth, and also the mother of our Lord and Savior. Piety demands, he says, that we admit that she was without sin.” Let us then leave aside the holy Virgin Mary; on account of the honour due to the Lord, I do not want to raise here any question about her when we are dealing with sins... Apart then from this virgin, if we could gather together all those holy men and women when they were living this life and could ask whether they were without sin, what are we to suppose that they would have answered? Would they answer what this fellow says or what the apostle John says? No matter how great was the excellence of their holiness when they lived in this body, if we could have asked them this question, they would have all cried out together, *If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us* (1 Jn 1:8).⁴⁹⁶

Aside from the interesting observation that Augustine distinguishes biblical figures into three categories – the men, the women, and the Virgin Mary – we find that he does not depict biblical women for the same reasons as Pelagius. He does not intend to show how human beings can, and therefore must, be perfect, but rather his depictions reflect his belief in the power of God’s grace. Augustine disagreed with the Pelagian use of biblical women as examples of *impeccantia* just as much as he would have disagreed with the Pelagian use of the martyrs as figures whose examples allow us no excuse for our ignorance or inability to live perfect lives.⁴⁹⁷ This might explain why Augustine is keen to depict those women involved in Jesus’s miracle stories: the woman bent double, the woman with a haemorrhage, the Canaanite woman. In all these cases, the women (or their children, in the case of the Canaanite woman) are healed by faith, but that faith is roused by the interior working of the Holy Spirit. The focus is not on the righteousness of the women, but rather the

⁴⁹⁶ *nat. et gr.* 36,42 (WSA I/23: 245-246). Although it must be noted that even those Pelagian texts addressed to women, such as Pelagius’s *Letter to Demetrias* (Rees: 35-70), focus more on the exemplary function and proofs of human righteousness found in the patriarchs, rather than biblical women.

⁴⁹⁷ For the use of the martyrs as exemplars in texts sympathetic to the Pelagian cause, see the letter *To a Sister in Christ* (Rees: 315-319). In this short letter, the language of a life of Christian struggle bears obvious allusions to the language of martyrdom. The use of the martyrs as examples of perfection that negate all excuses of ignorance are found in 3 (316) and 6 (318). And yet, it is intriguing that texts associated with Pelagianism do not make more frequent or elaborate use of the examples of the martyrs, especially as these texts often emphasise the motivation of doing good according to the reward that will be received after death, or the passing nature of temporal suffering when compared to eternal bliss: both themes that are prominent in martyrdom narratives and traditions.

attention is centred on God's grace. This is not just a polemical move, but it also bears a pastoral message: Augustine's representations of biblical women encourage the men and women in his audience to realise that they must not rely on themselves, but they must have faith, and place their hope, in God.

In these depictions, Augustine appeals to the stories of biblical women in order to draw attention to their moral meaning. His listeners are encouraged to perceive the women as symbols, metaphors, and personifications. There is no concern to delve into the subjectivity of the historical women represented. Their thoughts, emotions, feelings, and experiences are not described beyond that which is necessary for communicating the intended message and eliciting the anticipated response. These images do not teach us much about the female subjects of the depictions, but rather they teach us about how Augustine wanted to use images of biblical women to shape the lives of Christian women and men.

Full of Mysteries and Pregnant with Symbols

While the limits of this thesis restrict our focus, another point worth noting is that Augustine frequently presents biblical women as types of the Church. The presentation of the Church as a woman – and especially the image of the *mater Ecclesia* – was an extremely popular tradition in North Africa, as the writings of Tertullian and Cyprian attest,⁴⁹⁸ but it was also employed further afield, by men like Ambrose of Milan, Paulinus of Nola, and John Chrysostom.⁴⁹⁹ Augustine's firm position within this tradition is illustrated by one of his *Tractates on the First Epistle of John* (*In epistulam Iohannis*):

Whoever knows that he has been born, let him crave his mother's breasts, and he grows quickly. Now his mother is the Church, and her breasts are the two testaments of the sacred Scriptures. From this let the milk of all mysteries be sucked... Our milk is Christ in his humility; our solid food is the very same Christ, equal to the Father.⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁸ For the image of the Mother Church in North African art, architecture, polemical texts, and catechetical sermons, see Robin M. Jensen, '*Mater Ecclesia* and *Fons Aeterna*: The Church and Her Womb in Ancient Christian Tradition', in Levine and Robbins (2008), 137-55, esp. 140-45.

⁴⁹⁹ Joseph C. Plumpe, 'Ecclesia Mater', in *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 70 (1939), 535-55; Jensen (2008), 145-48.

⁵⁰⁰ *ep. Io.* 3.1 (FC 92: 159). Augustine uses maternal imagery for the Church in moral, doctrinal, polemical, and liturgical contexts. Some examples include: *ep.* 243.8 (WSA II/4: 167-68); *s.* 216.7 (WSA III/6: 171-72). Other examples will be referred to throughout this section.

Augustine also presents a number of biblical women as figures, symbols, or types of the Church. The first type of the Church is found in Eve.⁵⁰¹ Augustine presents Christ as the new Adam, and the Church as the new Eve. Just as Eve was created from the rib of Adam, so the Church was symbolised in the blood and water that poured from Christ's side while he hung on the cross: 'Adam prefigured Christ, and Eve prefigured the Church, which is why she was called the mother of the living (Gen 3:20). When was Eve fashioned? While Adam slept. And when did the Church's sacraments flow forth from Christ's side? While he slept on the cross'.⁵⁰² Eve is a figure (*figura*) of the Church, but the new Eve – the Church – supersedes the old.⁵⁰³ So, in another sermon, he says: 'As regards your being human, your one father was Adam, your one mother Eve; as regards your being Christian, your one father is God, your one mother the Church'.⁵⁰⁴

Augustine also depicts Rebecca as a type of the Church; she prefigures the mixed Church from whose womb both the elect and the damned are born.⁵⁰⁵ He explains: 'Rebecca was another type (*typus*) of the Church when twins struggled within her like two contending peoples... She moaned at the violence she was enduring, but when the time came to bring them forth she marked the difference between the twins who had made her pregnancy so difficult. The same is true today, brothers and sisters, as long as the Church's lot is to moan with pain, as long as she is in labour with her children, for within her are both good and bad people'.⁵⁰⁶ Rebecca not only signifies the Church (*haec Ecclesia significatur in Rebecca*),⁵⁰⁷ but she and the Church are almost indistinguishable: 'There are bad people in the Church, belonging to Esau, because they too are sons of Rebecca, sons of mother Church, born of her womb' (...*filius Rebeccae, filius matris Ecclesiae, de utero ipsius nati*).⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰¹ For Eve as a type of the Church see Bonner (1997a), 30.

⁵⁰² *en. Ps.* 40.10 (WSA III/16: 235), 126.7 (WSA III/20: 90); *s.* 5.3 (WSA III/1: 218-19), 218.14 (WSA III/6: 186), 336.5 (WSA III/9: 269-70).

⁵⁰³ *en. Ps.* 40.10 (WSA III/16: 235; PL 36: 0461), 126.8 (WSA III/20: 91; PL 37: 1673).

⁵⁰⁴ *s.* 399.3 (WSA III/10: 460). See also *s.* 56.14 (WSA III/3: 103).

⁵⁰⁵ *en. Ps.* 126.8 (WSA III/20: 91); *s.* 4.11, 31 (WSA III/1: 191, 201).

⁵⁰⁶ *ibid.* (WSA III/20: 91-92; PL 37: 1673). See also *civ. Dei*, 16.35 (Dyson: 749).

⁵⁰⁷ *s.* 4.11 (WSA III/1: 191; PL 38: 0039).

⁵⁰⁸ *ibid.* 31 (201; 0048).

In one of his *Tractates on the First Epistle of John*, Augustine discusses Rebecca's role as type of the Church, alongside that of Sarah and Hagar. He explains that Rebecca is an example of how both good and bad children can be born of a good person, whereas Sarah shows how good children can be born of good people, and Hagar demonstrates how bad children can be born of bad people.⁵⁰⁹ He then links this back to the Church, and draws parallels between Sarah and the Catholic Church, and Hagar and the heretical or schismatic churches (clearly with the Donatists in mind): 'He who is born from the Catholic Church is born, as it were, from Sarah, a free woman; he who is born from heresy, as it were, is born from a bond woman, but both still from the seed of Abraham'.⁵¹⁰

Furthermore, Augustine draws attention to the symbolic nature of the biblical narrative, saying: 'Hear and see in these ancient deeds all the signs and tokens of future things'.⁵¹¹ He explains that the story is prophetic: Sarah was concerned when she saw Ishmael and Isaac playing together (Gen. 21:9), because it was not innocent child's play, but Ishmael was persecuting Isaac; now the children of Hagar (heresies) persecute the children of Sarah (the Catholic Church).⁵¹² Likewise, Sarah's righteous chastisement of Hagar (Gen. 16:6), intended for correction, justifies the correction of those who persecute the Church, and God's words, urging Hagar to return to her mistress (Gen. 16:9), are now directed to those who remain outside of the unity of the Catholic Church. So Augustine says: 'if you have suffered, O party of Donatus, bodily affliction from the Catholic Church, you are Hagar, having suffered at the hands of Sarah. "Return to your mistress"'.⁵¹³ Here Augustine follows in the

⁵⁰⁹ *ep. Io.* 10.7(1) (FC 79: 16).

⁵¹⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹¹ *ep. Io.* 10.13(2) (FC 79: 23).

⁵¹² For the Pauline origins of "persecution" see Gal. 4:29. See *ep.* 93.7 (WSA II/1: 380): 'Isaac suffered persecution from Ishmael, *But as at that time the one who was born according to the flesh persecuted the one who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now* (Gal. 4:29). Thus those who can may understand that the Catholic Church suffers persecution from the pride and wickedness of carnal persons, whom it tries to correct by temporal troubles and fears. Whatever, then, the true mother does, even if it is felt to be harsh and bitter, she does not repay evil with evil, but applies the good of discipline to expel the evil of iniquity, not out of harmful hatred, but out of healing love'. Augustine also presents Hagar persecuting Sarah: *ep.* 185 (*On the Correction of the Donatists*), 2,11 (WSA II/3: 185): 'that girl persecuted Sarah more by her pride than Sarah persecuted her by restraining her'.

⁵¹³ *ep. Io.* 10.15(2) (FC 79: 27). This, of course, is linked to Augustine's rejection of the Donatists' claim that they were being persecuted and martyred. For Augustine's use of Sarah and Hagar in his anti-Donatist polemic, see Elizabeth Clark, 'Interpretive Fate amid the Church Fathers', in Phyllis Tribble and Letty M. Russell (eds.), *Hagar, Sarah, and their Children: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Perspectives* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 127-47, esp. 141-43.

footsteps of Paul's allegorical presentation of Sarah and Hagar.⁵¹⁴ In line with his biblical exegesis, and especially in defence of the continued validity of the Old Testament against the Manichees,⁵¹⁵ Augustine figuratively interpreted the actions and words of the patriarchs and matriarchs as prophetic events that point towards Christ and the Church. This approach is not concerned immediately with the subjectivity of the women involved, the historical events, or the literal interpretation of their actions, but it is a reading of the biblical text according to the measure of theological or spiritual truth.

In addition to the examples of Eve, Rebecca, and Sarah, Augustine says that Mary Magdalene 'was the Church' (*illa mulier Ecclesia erat*),⁵¹⁶ the woman bent double was 'a type of the Church' (*typus Ecclesiae*),⁵¹⁷ and the woman with a haemorrhage 'represented the Church from among the Gentile nations' (*Ecclesiam figurabat ex Gentibus*).⁵¹⁸ The Samaritan woman at the well is also described in these terms; in one of his *Tractates on the Gospel of John* (*In Iohannis evangelium tractatus*), Augustine tells his listeners that the biblical story is 'full of mysteries and pregnant with symbols'.⁵¹⁹ He explains that the Samaritan woman is a figure of the Church (*forma Ecclesiae*),⁵²⁰ and, more specifically, a type of the Gentile Church (*Ecclesia de Gentibus*).⁵²¹ Augustine further expands this allegorical interpretation

⁵¹⁴ For Paul's allegorical exegesis (Gal. 4:21-31), see E. Clark (2006), 130.

⁵¹⁵ See, for example, Augustine's extended comparison of Sarah and Abraham to the Church and Christ, in *c. Faust.* 22.38 (WSA I/20: 324) (the following is but a brief excerpt): 'Now, in that deed, which was done and included in the divine books and faithfully reported, who would not be delighted to examine as well what was done prophetically and to knock at the gate of the mystery with a pious faith and desire? In that way the Lord may open it and reveal whom that man symbolized and whose wife she was who is not allowed to be defiled and stained on this pilgrimage and among foreigners, so that she might be without spot or wrinkle for her husband. The Church, of course, lives correctly in the glory of Christ so that her beauty may bring honour to her husband, just as Abraham was honoured among foreigners on account of the beauty of Sarah'.

⁵¹⁶ *s.* 5.7 (WSA III/1: 222; PL 38: 0058). See also *s.* 143.4 (WSA III/4: 427), 245.4-5 (WSA III/7: 102; PL 38: 1153): 'So let the Church, which was being represented by Mary (*cuius figuram Maria gerebat*), hear what Mary heard'; *ep.* 120.15 (WSA II/2: 137; PL 33: 0459), on Jesus's words 'Do not touch me' (Jn. 20:17): 'when he said that to Mary, who, of course, symbolized the Church (*in qua figurata Ecclesia est*), he wanted her to understand (etc.)'.

⁵¹⁷ *Trin.* 4.2.7 (WSA I/5: 158; PL 42: 0893).

⁵¹⁸ *s.* 77.8 (WSA III/3: 321; PL 38: 0486). See also 63A.2 (WSA III/3: 177), 63B.2 (WSA III/3: 180), 299B.5 (WSA III/8: 247), 299C.5 (WSA III/8: 254).

⁵¹⁹ *Io. ev. tr.* 15.5 (FC 79: 80; PL 35: 1512): *plena mysteriis, et gravida sacramentis*.

⁵²⁰ *ibid.* 15.10(1) (FC 79: 84; PL 35: 1513).

⁵²¹ *ibid.* 15.10(2) (FC 79: 84; PL 35: 1514).

by encouraging his congregation to identify with that woman: ‘let us hear ourselves in that woman, let us recognise ourselves in that woman, and let us give thanks to God in that woman for ourselves’.⁵²²

But, as might be expected, the closest parallel between a biblical woman and the Church is found in the Virgin Mary. Augustine says that, while all people receive death through Eve, Christians receive life through Mary.⁵²³ Mary’s unique physical state of simultaneous virginity and maternity is reflected in the spiritual virginity and maternity of the collective Church body: ‘Only Mary, then, is mother and virgin both spiritually and physically, both Christ’s mother and Christ’s virgin. On the other hand, the Church as a whole, in the saints predestined to possess God’s kingdom, is Christ’s mother spiritually and also Christ’s virgin spiritually (*spiritu*), but as a whole she is not these things physically (*corpore*). Rather, in some persons she is a virgin of Christ and in others she is a mother, though not Christ’s mother. Both married women of faith and virgins consecrated to God are Christ’s mother spiritually’.⁵²⁴ Likewise, in a sermon delivered between 417 and 418, he describes Mary as ‘a representative figure of the Church’, whose physical maternity and virginity are reflected in the Church.⁵²⁵ He asks his listeners: ‘Who gave you birth? I hear you answering to yourselves, “Mother Church”. This holy and honourable mother is like Mary in that she both gives birth and is a virgin’.⁵²⁶ In an earlier sermon, he says that the Church imitates Mary’s virginity and maternity (*Mariam imitator*): ‘Did not the virgin, Saint Mary, both give birth and remain a virgin? So too the Church both gives birth and is a virgin’.⁵²⁷

⁵²² *ibid.* 15.10(2) (FC 79: 84; PL 35: 1514). For Augustine’s use of the words *forma*, *typus*, and *figura* in his descriptions of biblical women, see David Dawson, ‘Figure, Allegory’, art., in Fitzgerald (1999), 365–68, esp. 365: ‘one should not make too much of the nuances of these terms as they appear in particular passages. In particular, trying to sort out these terms according to a set of systematically organized categories seems to be an especially futile experience’.

⁵²³ For Augustine’s association of Mary and the Church, see Tilley (2006), 121–25. For Mary as the new Eve, see Power (1995), 182–89. For a brief overview, see Daniel Doyle, ‘Mary, Mother of God’, art., in Fitzgerald (1999), 542–45, esp. 544–45.

⁵²⁴ *virg.* 6,6 (WSA I/9: 71; PL 40: 0399).

⁵²⁵ *s.* 72A.8 (WSA III/3: 288).

⁵²⁶ *s.* 72A.8 (WSA III/3: 288). For the possible influence of Ambrose on Augustine, see Jensen (2008), 145–46.

⁵²⁷ *s.* 213.8 (WSA III/6: 145; PL 38: 1064).

As with his use of biblical women as exemplars, here again Augustine's typology is sexually consonant. He depicts the women in the Bible as types of the female Church, while he presents the men in the Bible as types of Christ.⁵²⁸ He takes an ecclesiological approach to depicting biblical women by showing how they prefigure, represent, and reflect the Church. In this way, he uses representations of biblical women to help his congregation to understand his own vision of the Church as it is now, and as it should be. The biblical women illustrate and communicate the nature and function of the Church as one single and unified body through which people can be reborn, nourished, and nurtured to the fullness of life. Augustine's biblical types of the Church are simultaneously images of individual women, with whom his audience are to identify through admiration and imitation, and they are embodiments or representatives of the Church community as one collective body. By comparing biblical women with the Church, Augustine informs both the individual and communal identity of the Christians in his audiences, helping them to understand their position, role, and purpose in this world. Furthermore, Augustine's depictions of biblical women at once exalt the position of women, as the symbolic locus for the reception of the sacraments, and the means through which salvation is found.

We find that these two different types of women – the earthly mother who is Eve or Hagar, and the spiritual mothers who are biblical women cast in a positive light – reflect that powerful contrast, found in the *Confessions*, of Augustine's struggle between the seductive caresses of his former loves, and the spiritual delights of Lady Chastity's embracing arms.⁵²⁹ Indeed, all throughout Augustine's writings and preaching, images of women are constructed by immensely powerful contrasts and comparisons. Augustine's images of women embody and convey diverse meanings, from the highest, most spiritual good to the lowest, most earthly evil. Indeed, one single woman can embody both good and bad qualities simultaneously, as Augustine's complex portrait of Monica illustrates so flagrantly. It is precisely these tensions that make his images of women fertile with potential and possibility.

⁵²⁸ See further Catherine Brown Tkacz, 'Typology', art., in Fitzgerald (1999), 855-57; *eadem*, 'The Doctrinal Context for Interpreting Women as Types of Christ', *SP*, 40 (2006), 253-57. The main exceptions here are those of Peter and Susanna. For Peter as a type of the Church see *en. Ps.* 118(13).3 (WSA III/19: 401); *s.* 76 (WSA III/3: 311-316).

⁵²⁹ *conf.* 8.11,26 (WSA I/1: 204-05).

Augustine was not unaware of this fact. He does not represent women in a detached manner, but rather his representations of women reveal a depth of engagement and involvement: we can sense his own feelings of surprise, wonder, and astonishment when he paints portraits of virtuous women; we can hear his tone of condemnation and reproach when he repeats the words or recalls the actions of sinful women; we can see his own anxieties and apprehensions when he reflects on the thought that all women, even good women, share the legacy of Eve.

Female Martyrs: figurae / formae Ecclesiae?

What has all this to do with Augustine's depictions of female martyrs? Considering the number of times that he draws parallels between biblical women and the Church, he must have found these ways of perceiving and representing biblical women meaningful, satisfying, and effective. When looking at Augustine's female martyrs, we must ask whether they also fit into this scheme of presenting women as types of the Church. Are female martyrs described as types, or embodiments, of the Church? Are his descriptions of female martyrs intended to communicate ideas and beliefs about the Mother Church? If so, then how and why? If not, then why not?

As we approach Augustine's female martyrs with these questions in mind, we make an astonishing discovery. While Augustine was so keen to draw parallels between biblical women and the Mother Church, he does not do the same for his female martyrs. In contrast to his representations of biblical women, there is only one exceptional case in which he presents a female martyr as a figure of the Church. Yet, even this exception is not without its complications, because the female martyr in question is the Maccabean Mother: a woman whose story was contained within Augustine's canon of the Bible,⁵³⁰ a woman who was praised by many Church Fathers for her role as an exemplary Christian mother;⁵³¹ a woman whose status as a

⁵³⁰ *doc. Chr.* 2.8 (Green: 36). The account of the Maccabean Martyrs is related in 2 Mac. 7:1-42.

⁵³¹ For example, Cyprian, *Exhortation to Martyrdom* (ANF 5: 496-507); Origen, *Exhortation to Martyrdom* (Greer: 41-79); Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 15* (FC 107: 72-84); John Chrysostom, *On Eleazar and the Seven Boys* (Mayer: 121-34); *idem*, *On the Holy Maccabees and their Mother* (Mayer: 137-45); *idem*, *Homily 2 on the Maccabees* (Mayer: 148-53); Ambrose, *Jacob and the Happy Life*, 9.42-12.57 (FC 65: 172-84). See also Stephen D. Moore and Janice Capel Anderson, 'Taking it Like a Man: Masculinity in 4 Maccabees', *JBL*, 117 (1998), 249-273; Robin D. Young 'The "Woman with the Soul of Abraham": Traditions about the Mother of the Maccabean Martyrs', in A. Levine (ed.), *"Women Like This": New Perspectives on Jewish Women in the Greco-Roman World*, Society of Biblical Literature (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholar's Press, 1991), 67-81.

literal or a metaphorical martyr is tantalisingly ambiguous in Augustine's sermons.⁵³² And so, Augustine's only presentation of a female martyr as a type of the Church is that of a biblical woman, whose identity as a martyr may be more spiritual than literal.⁵³³ In addition to this, we find that, in all of his references to the Maccabean Mother, it is her motherhood that defines her identity, and it is her motherhood that makes her life exemplary and useful within a Christian context.⁵³⁴ It is not surprising, then, to find that Augustine uses maternity and motherhood to link the Maccabean Mother with the Mother Church. So, in one of his *Commentaries on the Psalms*, he alludes to the antitypical role of Eve – the first mother, the mother of death – and he distances the Maccabean Mother from this first mother:

The cruel Antiochus even brought their mother to them [the seven boys], hoping that by her tender pleas they would be swayed toward love of this life, and so, by lusting to live in the sight of men, they would die to God. But this mother was not like Eve; she was more like the Mother Church (*illa mater, iam non Evae, sed matri Ecclesiae similis*). She had borne her sons in pain in order to look upon them living, but now she joyfully watched them dying, and begged them to choose death for the laws of the Lord their God.⁵³⁵

Here the Maccabean Mother is linked with Eve by her pain in childbirth, but she is distanced from Eve by her ability not just to bring her children to life in this world of mortality, but also to eternal life with God. Furthermore, while the Maccabean Mother physically gave birth in pain to her seven sons, when she urged them towards their spiritual rebirth, she did so joyfully. In this way, the Maccabean Mother is aligned with the Mother Church, as they both bring their children to eternal life through spiritual rebirth. Similarly, in a different sermon, the Maccabean Mother is presented as a mother of martyrs, a spiritual martyr, and a figure of the Mother Church:

⁵³² 2 Mac. 7:1-42 includes only a very brief reference to the death of the Maccabean Mother (2 Mac. 7:41: 'The mother of the sons died last'). An extended version is found in 4 Maccabees 17:1. Here she throws herself into the fire to avoid being touched by the soldiers. Ambrose used both the account of 2 Mac. 7:1-42, and that of 4 Maccabees, which was included in the *Vetus Latina* (*On Jacob and the Happy Life* [FC 65: 172-84]), so it is possible that Augustine would have known the extended account.

⁵³³ Although Augustine seems to imply that the Maccabean Mother was martyred after her sons, it is not exactly clear. He tends to focus on her spiritual martyrdom: s. 286.6 (WSA III/8: 104), 300.6-7 (WSA III/8: 279-80), 301.1 (WSA III/8: 282).

⁵³⁴ *ep.* 243.6 (WSA II/4: 167); s. 100.2 (WSA III/4: 61); *an. et or.* 1.23,25 (WSA I/23: 485, 486); *c. Iul.* 5.53 (WSA I/24: 466).

⁵³⁵ *en. Ps.* 68(2).3 (WSA III/17: 385; PL 36: 0855).

What has really astounded us is not just that she was a spectator of their deaths, but that she was actually urging them on. More fruitful of virtues than of offspring; seeing them battling, she was herself battling in them all, herself winning in all of them as they won. One woman, one mother, how she set before our eyes our one mother, holy Church, everywhere urging her children to die for the name of the one by whom she conceived and bore them! In this way the world has been filled with the blood of the martyrs.⁵³⁶

But the example of the Maccabean Mother is an exception. Indeed, if the Maccabean Mother's maternity seems like an obvious link that would naturally lead Augustine to present her as a figure of the Church, we would expect more examples of this in his depictions of female mother-martyrs, such as Perpetua, Felicitas, and Crispina. But Augustine does not use motherhood as a prompt for describing these female martyrs as types of the Mother Church.

This is even more surprising when we consider that female martyrs lend themselves so readily to such comparisons. This is not just the case for mother-martyrs, but for all female martyrs. For example, our ancient sources describe both the Church and female martyrs as Brides of Christ. The representation of the female martyr as a Bride of Christ is a common feature in descriptions of young virgin-martyrs, especially Blandina,⁵³⁷ Pelagia,⁵³⁸ and Agnes.⁵³⁹ Even Perpetua – a married woman and mother – is described as a *Dei delicata* and a *matrona Christi*.⁵⁴⁰ The depiction of female martyrs as Brides of Christ may be an extension of the image of the soul as the Bride of Christ: an image that is found in mystical, ascetical, exegetical, and homiletic sources, especially in reference to the Song of Songs.⁵⁴¹ When we consider that early Christian tradition identified the female voice of the Song of Songs with the Church (the *sponsa Christi*), we find that there is only one

⁵³⁶ s. 301.1 (WSA III/8: 282).

⁵³⁷ *The Martyrs of Lyons* (Musurillo: 79): 'she hastened to rejoin them [her fellow martyrs], rejoicing and glorifying in her death as though she had been invited to a bridal banquet instead of being a victim of the beasts'.

⁵³⁸ Chrysostom, *A Homily on the Martyr Drosis*, 9 (Mayer: 201). Ambrose, *On Virgins*, 7.33 (Ramsey: 115): 'It is reported that she adorned her head and put on a wedding garment, so that you might say that she was going not to her death but to her bridegroom'.

⁵³⁹ Ambrose, *On Virgins*, 1.2.8 (Ramsey: 75): 'No bride would hasten to her wedding as joyfully as the virgin proceeded with lively step to the place of her torture'. Prudentius, *Peristephanon*, 14 (LCL 398: 339, 343).

⁵⁴⁰ *The Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas*, 18 (Musurillo: 127).

⁵⁴¹ Origen was the first to make this link in *Commentary on the Song of Songs* (ACW 26: 21-63) (composed in 245-47).

small step to take in order to move from depicting female martyrs as Brides of Christ to depicting female martyrs as types of the Church.⁵⁴²

It is interesting to find that Augustine does not only identify the female voice of the Song of Songs with the Church,⁵⁴³ but also he uses the Song as a lens for perceiving female martyrs. So, he explains Crispina's motivation for martyrdom with Song 2:6 ('His left hand is beneath my head, and his right hand will embrace me').⁵⁴⁴ Also, he describes Donata and the Maccabean mother as acting in line with Song 2:4 ('Set love in order towards me').⁵⁴⁵ The very fact that Augustine appeals to the Song of Songs in these contexts is remarkable, particularly because this canonical book does not feature heavily in his works when compared to his other scriptural quotations.⁵⁴⁶ The comparison of these three martyrs with the female voice of the Song of Songs (which, we remember, is also identified as the voice of the Church) makes us anticipate that Augustine would use the Song as a unifying feature to create a link between the female martyrs and the Church: that he would extend his ecclesial interpretation of the Song of Songs to connect the female martyrs and the Church.

⁵⁴² The history of this image is complex, as it is influenced not only by the Song of Songs, but also by other factors, such as the Old Testament conjugal relationship between Israel and God (e.g. Is. 54:4-6, 62:4-5; Jer. 2:2, 3:1), New Testament references to marriage (e.g. Eph. 5:22-25, the marriage of the bride and the Lamb in Rev. 19:7-8, and the marriage of God and the heavenly Jerusalem in Rev. 21:2), and traditional Greco-Roman presentations of cities and institutions as female personifications. For typical patristic presentations of the Church as the *sponsa Christi*, see Origen, *Two Homilies on the Song of Songs*, 1.1, 2.1,3 (ACW 26: 267-68; 284, 287); Methodius, *Symposium*, 3.8, 7.7, 11.2.20 (ACW 27: 66-67, 102-03, 156); Ambrose, *On Virgins*, 1.6.31 (Ramsey: 81-82). For a selection of examples from Augustine's works, see *c. Faust.* 22.38 (WSA I/20: 324); *s.* 285.6 (WSA III/8: 98), 352A.2 (WSA III/11: 88); *en. Ps.* 94.11 (WSA III/18: 419).

⁵⁴³ See, for example, a sermon delivered on the festival of the martyrs Castus and Aemilius: *s.* 285.6 (WSA III/8: 98): 'there is what is said in the Song of Songs: *Unless you know yourself, O most beautiful among women*. We recognize, of course, to whom it's being said, and it's in her that we in fact hear this. It's the Church, in fact, which hears from Christ, the bride who hears from the bridegroom, *Unless you know yourself, O most beautiful among women* (Song 1:7)'.

⁵⁴⁴ *en. Ps.* 120.9, 13 (WSA III/19: 518, 524).

⁵⁴⁵ For Donata, see *s.* 37.23 (WSA III/2: 197). For the Maccabean Mother, see *s.* 100.2 (WSA III/4: 61). Origen also brings together the female voice of the Song of Songs and the voice of the martyrs when talking about both male and female martyrs without any gender distinction. See Origen, *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, 31 (Balthasar: 62), which quotes Song 2:10-11: 'Arise and come away, my love, my fair one, my dove; for lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone'.

⁵⁴⁶ See Michael Cameron, 'Augustine's Use of the Song of Songs Against the Donatists', in Frederick Van Fleteren and Joseph C. Schnaubelt (eds.), *Augustine: Biblical Exegete* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), 99-27. Elizabeth Clark makes the same observation ('Augustine, unlike Jerome and Ambrose, had little interest in the book'), as she notes the almost exclusively ecclesiological focus of Augustine's use of the Song of Songs in the Donatist debate. See E. Clark, 'The Uses of the Song of Songs: Origen and the Later Latin Fathers', in *eadem* (ed.), *Ascetic Piety and Women's Faith: Essays on Late Ancient Christianity* (Lewiston: Mellen, 1986), 386-427, at 408.

But he does not do this. He even avoids forming links when comparisons seem inevitable, such as the obvious connection between virgin-martyrs and the *Ecclesia virgo*. For example, in a sermon delivered on the festival of the virgin-martyr Agnes, Augustine gives an exposition of two obscure verses of the Song of Songs, but then, as he goes on to mention the female martyr, he leaves the Song behind, and does not associate the virgin-martyr with the Church.⁵⁴⁷

The absence of connections between female martyrs and the Church becomes even more intriguing when we consider that female martyrs present clear sacramental links with the Church. Not only do Augustine's mother-martyrs bear obvious parallels with the *mater Ecclesia*, and virgin-martyrs with the *Ecclesia virgo*, but, more generally, the blood spilled during martyrdom is an image that has clear allusions to Christ's blood that is shared at the Eucharist. More specifically for female martyrs, the image of the female martyr's body presents sacramental and ecclesiological allusions. For example, female martyrs in the arena adopt the maternal role of encouraging their metaphorical children towards the reward of eternal life, thus reflecting Mother Church's role in the spiritual rebirth of the newly baptised.⁵⁴⁸ The dripping breasts of the recent mothers, Perpetua and Felicitas, recall the nurturing breasts of the *Ecclesia lactans*, which provide her children with spiritual nourishment.⁵⁴⁹ The ancient notion that, after conception, menstrual blood was transformed into breast-milk could have been used to draw links between the literal fertility of the mother-martyrs and the spiritual fertility of the Church, just as allusions could be made to the milk that was drunk by neophytes at their baptism.⁵⁵⁰ Although we should not expect Augustine to make allusions simply because the opportunity presented itself to him, these examples do illustrate that there were many

⁵⁴⁷ s. 273 (WSA III/8: 17-21). Augustine discusses Song 4:16 ('Get up, North Wind; and come, South Wind, and breathe upon my garden, and the scents will flow') and Song 1:3 ('We will run after the odour of your ointments') in sections 4 and 5 of the sermon (WSA III/8: 18-19), and he mentions Agnes in section 6 (WSA III/8: 19-20).

⁵⁴⁸ Perpetua encourages Rusticus in *The Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas*, 20 (Musurillo: 129); Blandina encourages Ponticus in *The Martyrs of Lyons* (Musurillo: 79).

⁵⁴⁹ *The Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas*, 20 (Musurillo: 129). For Augustine's comments on the breasts of Mother Church see, for example, s. 183.12 (WSA III/5: 342); *en. Ps.* 10.1 (WSA III/15: 160); *ep.* 243.8 (WSA II/4: 167). The image of the *Ecclesia lactans* has obvious parallels with Augustine's presentation of Monica in *conf.* 3.4,8 (WSA I/1: 80), and so it supports the connection between Monica and the Mother Church. Although, in *conf.* 1.6,7 and 4.1,1 (WSA I/1: 43, 92), the milk does not flow from Monica, or from Augustine's wet-nurse, but from God himself.

⁵⁵⁰ Salisbury (2004), 122; Jensen (2008), 153.

ways that female martyrs could have been linked to the Church, should he have wanted to explore these avenues of allusions. But, whether or not he realised the potential for such links (and it would have been uncharacteristic for him to have overlooked this), still he avoids presenting his female martyrs as *figurae* or *formae* of the Church.

At first, this observation may appear to be insignificant. With the main exception of Peter, Augustine does not form links between male martyrs and the Church, so why should we expect him to do so for female martyrs? In addition to this, the association between female martyrs and the Church has little precedent in other Christian writings and sermons contemporary to Augustine. Also, we might think that Augustine's spiritual metaphor of the Church as the *totus Christus* may have led him away from female imagery of the Church, and thus away from forming a link between female martyrs and the Church. But the facts remain that tradition presents the Church as a woman, that most often Augustine's typology is sexually consonant, and that he frequently draws explicit links between biblical women and the Church. The reason for his reluctance to present female martyrs as types of the Church is, therefore, not a matter of their femininity (which, as we have seen, makes them powerful signifiers of the Church), but rather it is a matter of their identity as martyrs. Augustine does not wish to form such a close correlation between the Church and the image of a martyr. He seems to want to avoid, or perhaps even counteract, the signification and identification of the Church with the martyrs. The exact reasons for this attempt to distance the Church from the martyrs may now be a matter of speculation, but in considering possible answers we are led in the direction of Augustine's anti-Donatist polemics.

Blessed Daughters of Mother Church

Augustine's rejection of the female martyr as the defining symbol of the Church may have been a result of his attempts to create a distinction between the Catholic and Donatist Churches. Although martyrdom was not the only feature in Donatist self-identity, it was a dominant feature, which shaped and determined Donatist history, ecclesiology, social ideals, and ethics.⁵⁵¹ As the Donatist Church identified itself as the Church of the Martyrs, the image of the martyr could be seen almost as an

⁵⁵¹ See Chapter One (*True and False Martyrs*), above.

emblem that encapsulates and communicates Donatist beliefs. It is perhaps for this reason that Augustine would have found the image of a female martyr to be too loaded an image to embody and define the Catholic Church in relation to the Donatists, as well as too narrow and circumscriptive to be the dominant bearer of meaning for the universal Catholic Church, which is a mixed body that includes both saints and sinners, and values the married and the celibate alongside the martyrs. Perhaps the image of a young, female, virgin-martyr – the embodiment *par excellence* of a fountain sealed, a garden enclosed, and purity undefiled – would have been more appropriate to the Donatist ecclesiology of spotless perfection than the *corpus permixtum*, the ‘lily among the thorns’, that Augustine worked to defend.

While Augustine employed maternal imagery for the Church in his anti-Donatist polemic,⁵⁵² he preferred to retain what we might think of as a “generative hierarchy” in the context of his reflections on female martyrs. Despite repeatedly echoing Tertullian’s famous dictum that “the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church” (here alluding to spiritual conception), Augustine does not develop the parental symbolism that these words suggest, but instead he presents the martyrs as the *offspring* of the Church.⁵⁵³ The martyrs create the Church, but they are also created by the Church. Augustine does not equate the female martyrs with the Church, but rather he subjects them to the Church, as he presents them as obedient daughters. So, for example, in one sermon delivered at the festival of the Scillitan martyrs, he devotes the whole of the sermon to a discussion of “the valiant woman” of Proverbs 31, whom he identifies as the Mother Church: ‘It is the feast day of the martyrs, after all, and that is all the more reason for praising the mother of the martyrs’.⁵⁵⁴ He explains that he is aware that there were women among this group of the martyrs, but he chooses to focus on the praise of their mother: ‘as a matter of fact we did hear women mentioned in the solemn reading of the passion of the martyrs and I could quite properly talk about them, but we are not overlooking them when we

⁵⁵² For example, *ep.* 34.1-3 (WSA II/1: 118-19); *s.* 359.4 (WSA III/10: 202); *en. Ps.* 10.1 (WSA III/15: 160).

⁵⁵³ Tertullian, *Apology*, 1.50 (ANF 3: 55). For Augustine’s allusions to Tertullian, see, for example, *s.* 22.4 (WSA III/2: 44); 286.3 (WSA III/8: 102); 301.1 (WSA III/8: 282); 335E.2 (WSA III/9: 234); 229A.7 (WSA III/11: 270); *en. Ps.* 39.1 (WSA III/16: 194).

⁵⁵⁴ *s.* 37.1 (WSA III/2: 184).

praise their mother'.⁵⁵⁵ Towards the end of the long sermon, Augustine does refer to one of those female martyrs, Donata. He describes her as 'a blessed daughter of this lady [the Mother Church]'.⁵⁵⁶ Donata is not compared to the Church as a symbol or a type, but as an obedient daughter. This representation does not only situate the female martyr in a subservient position to the Church, but it also alludes to her legitimate birth from the womb of the free handmaid of God: the Catholic Church.⁵⁵⁷ Here a subtle distinction is drawn between the female martyr and the Church. The female martyr does not share in the fertile, generative, and life-giving capacities of the Church, but rather the martyr receives life from, and is nourished by, the Mother Church. Consequently, Augustine draws on the tradition of the Church as the mother of martyrs (a tradition already present in martyr *acta*, Tertullian, and Ambrose), and it is to this image that he adheres.⁵⁵⁸

In conclusion, by looking at Augustine's representations of biblical women, we have been able to elucidate one aspect of representation that we would not have noticed otherwise, precisely because it takes note of what Augustine does *not* say about his female martyrs. While arguments from silence do have their weaknesses, it is important to pay attention to those silences. Augustine's decision not to portray female martyrs as symbols of the Church should not be explained away as an oversight, but rather it should be interpreted as a polemical move that was one of many steps in the direction of creating a Catholic identity that valued the martyrs, but was not dependent upon them: that revealed the similarities between Catholics and

⁵⁵⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁵⁶ *s.* 37.23 (WSA III/2: 197; PL 38: 0232). Augustine's decision to describe Donata as a *beata filia* of the Church is particularly perplexing, considering that, later in the sermon, he discusses the meaning of Prv. 31:29 ('Many daughters have done mightily, but you have surpassed and outdone them all'; *multae filiae fecerunt potentiam: tu autem superasti, et superposuisti omnes*), and he explains that the *multae filiae* represent heresies (*s.* 37.27 [WSA III/2: 198; PL 38: 0233]). Immediately after this, he turns to explain the negative connotations of the word "daughters" in Song 2:2 ('Like a lily in the midst of the thorns, so is my darling in the midst of the daughters'), and here, he tells us, the *filiae* (*spinae*) are the sinners in the midst of the Church: the chaff among the wheat (*s.* 37.27 [WSA III/2: 199; PL 38: 0233]). Clearly Augustine does not intend to convey either of these two negative meanings for Donata, who is not just a *filia*, but rather a *beata filia*, and is held up as an example of a Christian life lived in accordance with the right ordering of love. However, he does not develop such a distinction between good and bad daughters, and so we cannot help wondering whether the negative connotations (in this context) of the word *filia* would have crossed his mind when describing Donata.

⁵⁵⁷ For the Catholic Church as the free handmaid of God, see *en. Ps.* 115(1).6 (WSA III/19: 330).

⁵⁵⁸ For example, *The Martyrs of Lyons* (Musurillo: 77); Tertullian, *To the Martyrs*, 1.1 (FC 40: 17); Ambrose, *Epistle*, 22 (FC 26: 376-384).

Donatists, but also drew distinctions between them. And so, we find that Augustine's female martyrs are full of possibility and potential, not only when they are described in detail, but also when there are absences where we would expect to find them present.

Conclusion: Expanding the Narrative

When Augustine reflected on the significance of *The Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas*, he clearly asserted that martyr *acta* and *passiones* do not carry the same authority as Scripture.⁵⁵⁹ Be that as it may, this should not cause us to think that his treatment of biblical women would vary greatly from his depictions of female martyrs. As we will see, many of the ways that he described and employed biblical women are also evident in his depictions of female martyrs. Augustine's descriptions of biblical women reveal the same logic of representation that underpins his depictions of female martyrs. The methods of representation, the selected themes, and the general conventions that he accepts or rejects when fashioning portraits of biblical women help us to acquire a better appreciation of this logic of representation. By looking at his depictions of biblical women, we get a deeper understanding of what he was thinking, doing, and hoping to achieve when he depicted female martyrs. We can see how images of women – all women – were good to think with. They enabled him to communicate theological messages, convey ecclesiological ideas, launch polemical attacks, and satisfy pastoral needs.

One of the most important points that we have raised in this chapter is that all of Augustine's representations of women are closely intertwined. The femininity of the martyrs binds them together with other women in the course of salvation history to create a shared history, a shared story, which is laid open for all women (and men) to enter into. Augustine's female martyrs are fragmentary pieces of a grander narrative. They are individual episodes taken from the scheme of salvation history. They are microcosmic parts of a cosmic drama. By taking note of the small pieces of the puzzle, we can start to see the significance of these elements in the larger whole. When seen together, these momentary glimpses construct a sweeping image of Augustine's perception of the universe, including the plight of every human being,

⁵⁵⁹ *an. et or.* 1.12,10 (WSA I/23: 479).

the shared journey of the body of the Church, and the anticipated rest in the communion of the saints.

The second observation that we can draw from this chapter is that Augustine's representations of biblical women serve a pastoral function. Especially within the context of preaching, he allows the stories of the biblical women to assume an almost parabolic quality. He uses their actions and words to convey a moral message, which is directed at both sexes, but is frequently tailored to speak specifically to the women in his congregations. Here we might venture to discern a rough division in Augustine's use of images of women. When he uses them to give practical advice for living life in the here and now, his biblical women speak more directly to the specific roles and duties expected of women as *feminae* or *mulieres*. However, when he depicts biblical women with an eschatological view to the journey towards eternal life, the images of biblical women speak to both men and women equally, as *homines*, united by their creation in the *imago Dei*, and joined together in the communal body of the Church.

Linked with this, Augustine's biblical women serve as positive and negative exemplars for both men and women, but the way that the exemplars are made to function varies according to whether they are presented to men or women. Augustine appears to see all women as changeable. All women have the potential to be either an Eve or a Mary. Even good women retain the legacy of Eve.⁵⁶⁰ In their daily lives, women must try to avoid being an Eve, or a Job's wife, or a Lot's wife, and they must try to imitate Mary or the Mother Church. Those women who live sinful lives are encouraged to follow the example of repentance provided by the woman who anointed Jesus's feet, and make the transition from an Eve to a Mary. However, this use of biblical women as both positive and negative exemplars was not the same for men. Augustine does not refer to the men in his congregation as potential Eves or Marys. There is no direct link or identification between biblical women and his male readers and listeners. Female figures, such as Eve and Mary, remain beyond the personal experiences of men. But the images of biblical women do give advice to men on how they should perceive, understand, and relate to women as "others". We might go so far as to suggest that it is as if the men in Augustine's audience are being presented with taxonomic images of biblical women to help them

⁵⁶⁰ *conf.* 5.8,15 (WSA I/1: 124).

to identify, categorise, and be wary of the tell-tale signs of Eve in their mothers, wives, and daughters. They are reminded of the constant need to be on their guard against the charms and seductions of women. And so, Augustine uses biblical exemplars differently for women and men: for women, the images of biblical women convey a message that is consolatory, inspiring, and motivational; for men, the images of biblical women speak a word of warning and urge men to look at women with a careful and cautious eye.

Augustine's pastoral use of representations of biblical women should lead us to expect to find similar pastoral functions in his images of female martyrs. We are alerted to the possibility that his depictions of female martyrs also might have been created with the specific intention to provide role models and exemplars exclusively for the women in the audience, while functioning in a different way for the men in the audience, and, perhaps, also providing a more spiritualised message for both women and men alike. This should be kept in mind as we approach the next two chapters of this study, in which we look at specific examples of how Augustine constructed and employed his depictions of female martyrs.

In this chapter we have seen that it is not enough to situate Augustine's female martyrs solely within the context of the cult of the saints, the constructive process of making martyrs, or the personal and pastoral value of using martyrs "to think with". In addition to these martyrological contexts, our attention must also be directed towards gender. We can only begin to understand Augustine's female martyrs once we have taken into consideration both his use of the martyrs "to think with" and his use of women "to think with". By aligning and combining these two concepts, we find that his images of female martyrs have an even more intense quality of creativity and freedom underlying their representation. They are constructed both as martyrs and as women. Bearing this in mind, we will now turn to consider how Augustine emphasised the femininity of his female martyrs to proclaim theological messages.

Chapter 4

AMBIVALENT IMAGES: WEAK FEMALE BODIES

In the opening sentence of her sourcebook, *Women in the Early Church*, Elizabeth Clark explains that if patristic attitudes towards women had to be summed up in one word, that word would be “ambivalence”.⁵⁶¹ She expands on this comment in her introductory chapter, which highlights the inconsistencies in patristic thought: while women were considered to be credulous, dishonest, and deceiving, they were also part of God’s good creation; although women were believed to be preoccupied with their physical appearance and driven by sexual appetites, they also performed extreme feats of ascetic restraint and provided unsurpassable examples of mystical marriage to Christ; while women were reminded that they had inherited the legacy of Eve, they were also taught that, for those who are in the body of Christ, there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female. As Clark explains, ‘[w]omen were extravagantly lauded and are inordinately denounced for the world’s woes by one and the same author: rarely are they seen with the same virtues and weaknesses as men’.⁵⁶²

The explanation for such ambivalence has been addressed by Graham Gould, who describes how patristic reflections on women can only be understood once they are seen within their wider historical, religious, intellectual, and cultural milieus. He explains: ‘Much patristic teaching about women is affected by this tension between recognition of the equality of women with men in the Christian life and the influence of inherited beliefs about female inferiority on the language employed to describe the religious achievements of women’.⁵⁶³ Gould’s comments on patristic ambivalence

⁵⁶¹ Elizabeth A. Clark, *Women in the Early Church*, Message of the Fathers of the Church, 13 (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1983), 15: ‘The most fitting word with which to describe the Church Fathers’ attitude toward women is ambivalence’.

⁵⁶² *ibid.* 24.

⁵⁶³ Graham Gould, ‘Women in the Writings of the Fathers: Language, Belief, and Reality’, in W. J. Shields and D. Wood (eds.), *Women and the Church*, Studies in Church History, 27 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), 1-13. Here Gould makes a point that has also been observed by Gerald Bonner and Edmund Hill for the specific case of Augustine’s views on women. See Gerald Bonner, ‘Augustine’s Attitude to Women and ‘Amicitia’’, in Cornelius Mayer and Karl Heinz Chelius (eds.), *Homo Spiritualis: Festgabe für Luc Verheijen OSA* (Würzburg: Augustinus, 1987); Edmund Hill, ‘St Augustine: A Male Chauvinist? A Talk Given to the Robert Hugh Benson Graduate Society at Fisher House, Cambridge, 22nd November 1994’, www.ewtn.com/library/theology/malechau.htm (accessed: 24th September 2008).

remind us that the Church Fathers' views on women were not detached from time and place, but rather they were formed by men whose minds were shaped by their own broader worldviews. As with other aspects of early Christian belief, identity, and self-representation, many different factors – including cultural assumptions, social values, customs and conventions, religious beliefs, shared education, and linguistic turns of phrase – were accepted in varying degrees, from subconscious assumption to conscious modification and even complete redefinition. This fusion of elements inevitably gave rise to a number of fractures and fissures, which reveal inconsistencies that are not necessarily ambivalent in the sense of hesitancy or indecisiveness, but rather that opposing and conflicting views were held simultaneously, often without any real attempt to reconcile or resolve the coexistence of contradictions.

Margaret Miles goes so far as to show that it is precisely the tension that arises from ambivalence which makes early Christian reflections on women so meaningful:

In the early Christian movement and in its medieval and early modern successors, then, two conflicting images of woman must be taken into account: a vision of equality (Galatians 3:28) *and* the reaction to that vision: “You are all Eves” [see Tertullian]. Neither of these contradictory views can be collapsed into the other so as to make one of them central, decisive, normative... [I]t was the tension between these two views of women that held them in suspension, unresolved, highly volatile, and carrying great affective energy.⁵⁶⁴

Here Miles explains that contradictory views on women were held in an unstable suspension, with the result that the coupling of positive and negative images of women produced a palpable dynamism that the Church Fathers were able to harness, control, and direct. For example, we can see this happening in the frequent juxtaposition of Eve and Mary in patristic reflections on recapitulation.⁵⁶⁵ As we saw in the previous chapter, the positive significance of Mary is only realised once she is seen alongside her negative counterpart; the redemption of women through Mary only makes sense according to a prior guilty association of all women with

⁵⁶⁴ Miles (1991), 84.

⁵⁶⁵ For the Eve / Mary recapitulation, see, for example, Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 5.19.1 (ANCL 9: 106-07); Jerome, *ep.* 22.21.6-7 (ACW 33: 154); Augustine, *s.* 191.3 (WSA III/6: 43), 289.2 (WSA III/8: 119-20).

Eve. Yet, despite this recapitulation, Mary does not replace Eve as the figurehead of the female sex. Mary does not become the one 'central, decisive, normative' image with which all women are identified. The figure of Eve remains present, roaming the earth in the guise of the overzealous mother, the sweet-talking wife, or the seductive adulteress. As a result, every woman is encouraged to see herself balanced unsteadily between Eve and Mary, and oscillating between negative and positive images of women. So, while patristic notions of recapitulation bring together opposing images of women, both of the images remain central, so that the interplay between them continues to create a tension that can be directed towards theological and pastoral ends.

The coupling and suspension of seemingly contradictory views is also evident in depictions of female martyrs. But, while the above example relies on the comparison of two different women (Eve and Mary), the female martyr becomes the one site, *locus*, or meeting-point at which positive and negative ideas about women are brought together. The clearest example of this is found in Augustine's depiction of Felicitas at the moment of her childbirth: 'In giving birth, she testified with her woman's voice to her woman's condition. The punishment of Eve was not missing, but the grace of Mary was at hand'.⁵⁶⁶ Here Felicitas identifies with Eve in her labour pains, but, at the same time, she shares in the grace of Mary, whose birth of the Son of God redeemed the female sex. The female martyr becomes the site at which binary opposites are brought together in unresolved tension: she had inherited the guilt and punishment of Eve, but she is one of the select few who achieves perfection in this life; she was tempted by love for this world and the fear of pain and death, but she overcame earthly bonds; she was afflicted with the weakness that is typical of her sex, but she acts with unsurpassable strength. Consequently, the image of the female martyr is a picture of a woman perched precariously between inferiority and equality, between sin and perfection, between weakness and strength. This ambivalent image is animated and charged with interpretive potential. As we will see, when the seemingly contradictory elements are brought into contact, they release sparks of theological truth.

⁵⁶⁶ *s.* 281.3 (WSA III/8: 79). See also Augustine's similar presentation of female virgins in *s.* 191.3 (WSA III/6: 43): 'As he heals in you the hurt you have derived from Eve, perish the thought that he would spoil what you have valued in Mary'.

In this chapter we will focus on the ambivalent quality of Augustine's female martyrs. In particular, we will explore how he constructs images of weak women who are transformed into physically and spiritually strong martyrs by the power of God's grace. By drawing on traditional gender stereotypes that associated women with weakness, Augustine purposefully retained, and consciously created, a tension between the assumed weakness of women and the evident strength of the female martyrs.⁵⁶⁷

When we first consider Augustine's image of the weak female martyr, it might seem to expose his ready acceptance of cultural assumptions and gender stereotypes concerning womanly weakness and female inferiority. Upon first glance, the image of the weak woman made strong in Christ seems to reveal a condescending and subordinating attitude towards women. However, upon closer inspection, we find that Augustine revises and modifies those stereotypes. By emphasising and exaggerating the assumed weakness of women, he uses the image of the female martyr to provide unavoidable evidence and forceful revelations of the true source of all strength: God. Consequently, while the coexistence of weakness and strength might seem to be contradictory or even demeaning, Augustine's message depends on their simultaneity. It is this very ambivalence that endows the female martyrs with theological meaning. As we will see, by focusing on the relationship between weakness and strength, Augustine presents the female martyrs as weak vessels of divine grace, and mediums for the revelation of God's truth.

Church Fathers and Women Martyrs

Whether in times of persecution or times of peace, accounts of women martyrs were 'stories people want'.⁵⁶⁸ The abundance of early Christian texts and images depicting female martyrs reveals a popular and persistent desire to remember the

⁵⁶⁷ For the assumed weakness of women, see Suzanne Dixon, 'Infirmitas Sexus: Womanly Weakness in Roman Law', *Tijdschrift voor Rechtsgeschiedenis* (1984), 343-70, esp. 357: 'The interchangeability of the terms *infirmitas/ levitas/ imbecillitas*... suggests that the authors were drawing on a vaguely defined pool of assumptions about the female character, where concepts easily merged into each other – e.g. physical weakness to timidity to gullibility'. For womanly weakness and Roman law, see Gillian Clark (1993b), esp. 56-62. For further reflections on womanly weakness, see Elena Martin, 'Iconic Women: Martyrdom and the Female Body in Early Christianity', Unpublished Master's Dissertation, Durham University (2006), esp. 80-90.

⁵⁶⁸ For 'stories people want', see Averil Cameron, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse*, Sather Classical Lectures, vol. 55 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 89-119.

holy women.⁵⁶⁹ This desire is explained, in part, by the exceptional presence of women among the martyrs. Persecution gave women the opportunity to proclaim their faith in public and to equal men in the conviction of their confession and the extremity of their discipleship.⁵⁷⁰ Spectacular accounts of female martyrdom aroused awe and admiration among those Christians who faced persecution and those who lived lives of spiritual martyrdom in times of relative peace.⁵⁷¹ As the memory of the female martyrs was recalled and repeated in different times and places, several general characteristics came to be associated with the women and their stories. We have already encountered one of these: the popular eroticisation of the female martyr's torture and death. But another feature that came to be associated with the memory of the female martyrs – the feature that we will explore in this chapter – is womanly weakness; that is, the female martyr's astonishing ability to overcome the weakness of her sex and suffer death in the name of Christ.

Throughout Christian history the image of the weak woman martyr has been used to proclaim theological truths; womanly weakness has been used to reveal divine power.⁵⁷² But associations between female martyrs and womanly weakness are anticipated, or even rooted, in the patristic era. It is in the first five centuries of

⁵⁶⁹ Although it is highly desirable, at present there is no single study that focuses on images of female martyrs in early Christian artwork. For images of Agnes, see the many examples in Guy Ferrari (ed.), *The Gold-Glass Collection of the Vatican Library: With Additional Catalogues of Other Gold-Glass Collections* (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1959). For images of Thecla, see the illustrations and discussion in Castelli (2004), 157-71. For a North African depiction of a female martyr on a terracotta bowl (c. 350-430), see fig. 49 in John J. Hermmann and Annewies van den Hoek, *Light From the Age of Augustine: Late Antique Ceramics From North Africa (Tunisia)* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Divinity School, 2002), 59. For further discussion of this image, as well as that of other North African images of women and female martyrs thrown to the beasts, see Hermmann and van den Hoek, 'Thecla the Beast Fighter: A Female Emblem of Deliverance in Early Christian Popular Art', *Studia Philonica Annual*, 13 (2001), 212-49.

⁵⁷⁰ For example, Hall (1993), 1-21; Rachel Moriarty, 'Playing the Man: the Courage of Christian Martyrs, Translated and Transposed', in R. N. Swanson (ed.), *Gender and Christian Religion*, SCH, vol. 34 (Suffolk; Rochester, NY: Boydell, 1998), 1-11.

⁵⁷¹ Jones (1993), esp. 33-34.

⁵⁷² For female virgin martyrs in the medieval period, see Karen Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), 12: 'As the most vulnerable and carnal of human beings – women – the virgin martyrs testify that the flesh can indeed triumph over corporeal desires, that weakness can prevail over strength'. For John Foxe's *The Book of Martyrs*, see Ellen Macek, 'The Emergence of a Feminine Spirituality in the Book of Martyrs', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 19 (1988), 63-80, at 66: 'It is the very lowliness of the women's social status, in many cases, and the cultural disadvantages of their class and gender that Foxe exposes, because it fits so well with his paradigm of divine intervention in human affairs. If anything, Foxe may underestimate the individual strength of character behind any one of his female subjects in the effort to prove that God uses the weakest of human agents in extraordinary ways'.

the Church that we find Christian men trying to make sense of the figure of the female martyr and, in doing so, producing the very first depictions of weak women martyrs. Ranging from rough sketches in passing remarks to detailed depictions in long sermons, the image of the weak woman martyr was constructed and developed to convey theological truths and provide moral instruction.

Current scholarship on martyrdom tends to overlook the image of the weak woman martyr by emphasising masculine or manly martyrs: female martyrs who “become male”.⁵⁷³ Yet, it is important for us to realise that, in early Christianity, female martyrs were not only presented as embodiments of masculine virtue, but they were also explicitly linked with womanly weakness.⁵⁷⁴ In fact, by emphasising womanly weakness the Church Fathers found meaning in the memory of the female martyrs. And so, by focusing on weakness, we can identify those elements that are unique to depictions of female martyrs. Here we will provide a few brief snapshots to illustrate how the image of the weak woman martyr was a popular way of remembering and presenting the female martyr in early Christianity.

In times of persecution, the image of the weak woman martyr served a pastoral function. The female martyr’s example of extreme and steadfast endurance was used to inspire and encourage those Christians who faced similar trials. So, for example, at around the year 197, the North African layman, Tertullian, wrote to a group of male and female confessors who were in prison awaiting martyrdom.⁵⁷⁵ He tried to reassure them that they should not despair or think that they are too weak to endure the sufferings of imprisonment and martyrdom. He encouraged them to think of their time in prison as a time of strengthening, just as soldiers practice restraint

⁵⁷³ For the theme of “becoming male”, see Miles (1989), 53-77; Elizabeth Castelli, “‘I Will Make Mary Male’: Pieties of the Body and Gender Transformation of Christian Women in Late Antiquity”, in Julia Epstein and Kristina Straub, *Body Guards: The Cultural Politics of Gender Ambiguity* (New York; London: Routledge, 1991), 29-49.

⁵⁷⁴ Stephanie L. Cobb makes a similar observation: ‘Modern readers have given much attention to the depictions of virile women but gloss over the seemingly banal descriptions of women as daughters and mothers who are modest and beautiful’. See Cobb, *Dying to be Men: Gender and Language in Early Christian Martyr Texts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 7. While Cobb does consider feminine roles of female martyrs, she does not explore the issue in great detail. This is, perhaps, because feminine female martyrs do not sit comfortably with her presentation of all the martyrs – both male and female – as ideal men.

⁵⁷⁵ Tertullian, *To the Martyrs* (FC 40: 17-28). For an overview of Tertullian’s attitude towards martyrdom, see Timothy David Barnes, *Tertullian: A Historical and Literary Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), esp. 164-86.

before going into battle.⁵⁷⁶ He made allowances for their fear by reminding them of Jesus's words: the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.⁵⁷⁷ After speaking about the weakness of the flesh, Tertullian says: 'Granted, these sufferings are grievous, yet many have borne them patiently, nay, have even sought them on their own accord for the sake of fame and glory; and this is true not only of men but also of women so that you, too, O blessed women, may be worthy of your sex'.⁵⁷⁸ Here the assumption is that women are the weaker sex. If *even* weak women have endured torture, then nobody else should think that are unable to do the same. Both the male and female confessors are to be encouraged and strengthened by the fact that even weak women have been able to face torture and death.

Likewise, the North African bishop and martyr, Cyprian, also commented on weak women martyrs. While he devoted comparatively little time to commenting on the female martyrs, he did provide some brief reflections that emphasise womanly weakness.⁵⁷⁹ For example, in the introduction to his treatise *On the Lapsed*, which he wrote in the year 251, he draws attention to those female martyrs who 'in their struggle with the world have also overcome their sex'.⁵⁸⁰ Commenting on this passage, Geoffrey Dunn explains that the reference to womanly weakness should be understood as a positive remark: 'Cyprian's brief comment gives no indication that he was anything but delighted (and doubly so) at the fact that there were women confessors and that they had overcome their natural weakness'.⁵⁸¹ At a similar time (250), Cyprian wrote a letter to Rogatian and his fellow confessors, in which he draws attention to the women among them: 'Blessed women also who are placed with you in the same glory of confession, who keep faith in the Lord, and stronger than their sex, are not only themselves very near to the crown, but they have offered to other women also an example by their constancy'.⁵⁸² As with Tertullian before

⁵⁷⁶ Tertullian, *To the Martyrs*, 3 (FC 40: 22-23).

⁵⁷⁷ *ibid.* 4 (24). (Mt 26:41; Mk. 14:38).

⁵⁷⁸ *ibid.* 4.3 (24).

⁵⁷⁹ For the Maccabean Mother, see Cyprian, *Exhortation to Martyrdom, to Fortunatus*, 11 (FC 36: 337). See further Geoffrey Dunn, 'Cyprian and Women in a Time of Persecution', *JEH*, 57 (2006), 205-25.

⁵⁸⁰ Cyprian, *On the Lapsed*, 2 (FC 36: 58).

⁵⁸¹ Dunn (2006), 215.

⁵⁸² Cyprian, *ep.* 6.3 (FC 51: 18).

him, Cyprian presents female martyrs and confessors as inspirational exemplars who encourage other Christians towards imitation in times of persecution.

A more developed image is found in the depiction of Blandina. The account of Blandina's martyrdom is contained in a letter in the fifth book of Eusebius's *Ecclesiastical History*.⁵⁸³ Here the image of the female martyr reveals the same theme of transformation from weakness to strength. When Blandina is first mentioned, she is described as someone 'through whom Christ proved that the things that men think cheap, ugly, and contemptuous are deemed worthy of glory before God'.⁵⁸⁴ We are told that Blandina was a slave, and her mistress was concerned that she was too weak to confess her faith.⁵⁸⁵ But, despite her physical weakness, Blandina is presented as the primary exemplar of spiritual strength: she 'was filled with such power that even those who were taking turns to torture her in every way from dawn to dusk were weary and exhausted'.⁵⁸⁶ This is most clearly seen in the climax of the narrative: a "christophany" in which Blandina's body reveals the crucified Christ:

Blandina was hung on a post... She seemed to hang there in the form of a cross, and by her fervent prayer she aroused intense enthusiasm in those who were undergoing their ordeal, for in their torment with their physical eyes they saw in the person of their sister him who was crucified for them.⁵⁸⁷

It is in the weak, lowly body of a female slave that Christ is revealed to the group of martyrs. The letter continues to explain the meaning of this: 'tiny, weak, and insignificant as she was she would give inspiration to her brothers, for she had put on Christ, that mighty and invincible athlete'.⁵⁸⁸ Because of her love for Christ and her confession of his name, Blandina is transformed from weakness to strength. She becomes an icon that reveals the presence and power of Christ.

⁵⁸³ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 5.1-2 (FC 19: 272-89); *The Martyrs of Lyons* (Musurillo: 63-85). For a discussion of the date of the *Ecclesiastical History*, including the possibility of an unpublished first draft of books 1-7 completed by 303 C.E., see William Tabbernee, 'Eusebius' "Theology of Persecution": As Seen in the Various Editions of his Church History', *JECS*, 5 (1997), 319-34. For Eusebius's views on female martyrs, see Elizabeth Clark, 'Eusebius on Women in Early Church History', in Attridge and Hata (eds.), *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism*, *Studia Post-Biblica*, vol. 42 (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1992), 256-69.

⁵⁸⁴ *The Martyrs of Lyons*, 5.1 (Musurillo: 67).

⁵⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁵⁸⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁸⁷ *ibid.* (75).

⁵⁸⁸ *ibid.*

A similar message is found in Athanasius's presentation of female martyrs in *On the Incarnation of the Word* (c. 328-335).⁵⁸⁹ Here he appeals to martyrdom as a proof of Christ's divinity; the martyrs visibly reveal the reality and effects of Christ's Incarnation, death, and resurrection.⁵⁹⁰ With this aim in mind, Athanasius presents the image of the weak woman martyr:

Now that the Saviour has raised his body, death is no longer terrible, but all those who believe in Christ tread it underfoot as nothing, and prefer to die rather than to deny their faith in Christ... Even children hasten thus to die, and not men only, but women train themselves by bodily discipline to meet it. So weak has death become that even women, who used to be taken in by it, mock at it now as a dead thing robbed of all its strength.⁵⁹¹

The image of triumphant female martyrs rushing towards death presents us with a great reversal. Before Christ, death was strong and human beings were weak. But now, after the triumph of Christ, death is so weak that it has become the object of mockery among even the weakest human beings: women and children. For Athanasius, this reversal communicates a great theological message:

If you see with your own eyes men and women and children, even, thus welcoming death for the sake of Christ's religion, how can you be so utterly silly and incredulous and maimed in your mind as not to realise that Christ, to whom these all bear witness, himself gives the victory to each, making death completely powerless for those who hold his faith and bear the sign of the cross?⁵⁹²

The image has a deep theological significance. It reveals the reality, truth, and consequences of the death and resurrection of Christ.

The most powerful depictions of weak women martyrs outside of Augustine's sermons are found in John Chrysostom's martyr homilies, which date from 386

⁵⁸⁹ For brief comments on Athanasius's attitudes towards martyrdom, see McGuckin (1993).

⁵⁹⁰ McGuckin (1993), 41: 'the martyrs' courage is one of the signs that the new age of Christ has arrived, and with it a transformation of the old human nature. His several references to women martyrs, in particular, as something *contra naturam* being a sign of something *supra naturam*, is indicative of this approach'.

⁵⁹¹ Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word*, 27 (57). Cf. Gregory Thaumaturgus, *On all the Saints* (ANCL 20: 153-56): 'these [martyrs] have inspired aged men to accomplish with much love a long course... and they have stimulated women to finish their course like the young men, and have brought to this, too, those of tender years, yea, even creeping children. In this wise have the martyrs shown their power, leaping with joy in the presence of death, laughing at the sword, making sport of the wrath of princes, grasping at death as the producer of deathlessness'.

⁵⁹² Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word*, 29 (59-60).

onwards.⁵⁹³ Just like Augustine, Chrysostom felt the need to remind his listeners that the martyrs were human beings. They were made of flesh and blood, not stone or steel. They were weak athletes who needed to be supported and strengthened by the president of the games. Chrysostom affirmed that the martyr's triumph is a powerful revelation of divine grace. God fills and strengthens the martyrs, lends them a helping hand, enables them to endure horrific torture, and ensures that they will receive the glorious crown of victory: 'The athletes are not vigorous in the flesh, but they are vigorous in their faith. Their constitution is weak, but the grace that sustains them is powerful'.⁵⁹⁴ Chrysostom explains that God has allowed men and women, the old and the young, to be counted among the martyrs, in order to show how 'his power is perfected in weakness' (2 Cor. 12:9).⁵⁹⁵ But divine power is most effectively shown in the weakest of these: women.⁵⁹⁶

So, in a sermon on the Maccabees, Chrysostom says: 'let us dismiss the old man and the children and turn our focus to the weaker among them – the wife, the old woman, the mother of seven children'.⁵⁹⁷ He explains that the Maccabean Mother was not only afflicted by the weakness of her sex and the infirmity of her age, but she was weakened even further by maternal emotion: 'Even if she was zealous, she also shared a woman's nature. Even if she seethed with the zeal of piety, she was also restrained by the bond of child-birth', he continues, 'even if a person were made of stone, even if her stomach were made of steel, wouldn't she have been utterly churned up, wouldn't she have experienced something of the kind both a woman and mother were likely to feel?'.⁵⁹⁸ For Chrysostom, the Maccabean Mother is not a woman with a mind of mettle, or a Stoic philosopher in a middle state of neither joy nor pain. She is a woman and a mother, who is churned up, torn apart, and pulled about by the passions and bonds of motherly love. She experiences the frailty of old age, the weakness of womanly nature, and the inner turmoil of

⁵⁹³ For Chrysostom's attitude towards martyrdom, see Straw (2005), 521-554.

⁵⁹⁴ Chrysostom, *On the Holy Maccabees and their Mother*, 3 (Mayer: 138-39). However, see Straw (2005), 546: 'Unlike others, such as Augustine, John has no qualms about Christians' active and voluntary martyrdom'.

⁵⁹⁵ Chrysostom, *On the Holy Maccabees and their Mother*, 4 (Mayer: 139).

⁵⁹⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁹⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁹⁸ *ibid.* 5 (140-41).

maternal emotion. Her ability to conquer this overwhelming weakness points towards a source of strength that lies beyond: God.

A similar message is found in Chrysostom's description of the woman martyr, Domnina.⁵⁹⁹ In words reminiscent of Athanasius, he says: 'Praise God! A woman braved death; a woman who brought death into our life – the Devil's own ancient weapon – defeated the Devil's power. Women are challenging death. Who wouldn't be amazed?... For, tell me, what greater sign of that resurrection do you seek, when you see that so great a reversal of reality has taken place?'⁶⁰⁰ Here the female martyr's transformation from weakness to strength is presented as proof of God's power: 'I produce these proofs not so that we might condemn the saints, but so that we might marvel at God's power'.⁶⁰¹ The female martyr's transformation from weakness to strength, from credulity to faith, provides the most convincing proof of the truth and effects of the resurrection: 'Beloved, previously nothing was stronger than it [death] and nothing weaker than us. But now nothing is weaker than it and nothing stronger than us. Do you see how outstanding the reversal is? How God made the strong weak and rendered the weak strong, demonstrating his power to us in both instances?'⁶⁰²

For Chrysostom, the image of the weak woman martyr is undeniably theological. The female martyr's transformation from weakness to strength is placed within the wider theological framework of the Fall of humankind, and the salvific action of the death and resurrection of Christ. These ideas are summarised neatly in his homily on the female martyr Drosis: 'This is why I especially love the commemorations of the martyrs; [why] while I both love and embrace them all, [I do so] especially when it happens to be women who are competing. For the weaker the vessel, the greater the grace, the more brilliant the trophy, the more famous the victory'.⁶⁰³

It is beyond the scope of this study to explore images of weak women martyrs in greater detail. However, we might give a cursory mention of other examples of

⁵⁹⁹ Chrysostom, *A Homily on Saints Bernike, Prosdoke, and Domnina* (Mayer: 158-76).

⁶⁰⁰ *A Homily on Saints Bernike, Prosdoke, and Domnina*, 1 (Mayer: 158-59). Cf. *A Homily on Pelagia, Virgin and Martyr*, 1 (Mayer: 149-50); *A Homily on the Martyr Drosis*, 5 (Mayer: 196).

⁶⁰¹ Chrysostom, *A Homily on Saints Bernike, Prosdoke, and Domnina* (Mayer: 159).

⁶⁰² *ibid.* 2 (159).

⁶⁰³ *A Homily on the Martyr Drosis*, 7 (Mayer: 198).

images of weak women martyrs: Origen's depiction of the Maccabean Mother;⁶⁰⁴ Lactantius's appeal to female martyrs for apologetic purposes;⁶⁰⁵ Ambrose's depictions of young virgin martyrs;⁶⁰⁶ Asterius's description of the vulnerable Euphemia;⁶⁰⁷ Basil's praise of the married woman Julitta.⁶⁰⁸ We might also like to bear in mind those depictions of female martyrs that stand outside of this general trend: Prudentius's poems on the strong-willed Eulalia and the courageous Agnes.⁶⁰⁹

It is hoped that this short survey has been sufficient to show that womanly weakness played a special role in the way that female martyrs were remembered and represented in early Christianity. By the time that Augustine came to reflect on the female martyrs in his writings and sermons, the image of the weak woman martyr was already being used to embody and convey a range of theological and pastoral messages, and, most importantly, to provide an undeniable proof of the resurrection, and a forceful revelation of the power of God's grace.⁶¹⁰

The popularity of womanly weakness as a characteristic theme in female martyrdom prompts us to anticipate that Augustine would also draw attention to the theological significance of womanly weakness in his depictions of female martyrs. This seems to be even more likely when we consider that weakness was a theme that went right to the very heart of his personal and theological reflections. Bearing this in mind, we should briefly consider his theological reflections on human weakness.

⁶⁰⁴ Origen, *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, 23 (Greer: 57-59).

⁶⁰⁵ Lactantius, *Divine Institutes*, 5.13.11-12, 14 (Bowen & Garnsey: 307): 'When ordinary people see men being torn apart with different sorts of torture and yet maintaining their endurance unbowed while their tormentors grow weary, they come to the conclusion, quite rightly, that the resolute consensus of so many people dying is no empty thing, and that endurance itself could not survive so much agony without God... Our people, however – and I will leave out our men – our women and children triumph over their tormentors without a sound... look at our weaker sex, and look at our children in their weakness, enduring the torture of every limb and the torture of fire, not because they must – they could avoid it if they wished – but willingly, because they trust in God'.

⁶⁰⁶ Ambrose, *On Virgins*, esp. 1.2.5-3.10, 1.4.19, 2.4.22-33, 3.7.33-38 (Ramsey: 74-76, 78, 96-101, 114-16).

⁶⁰⁷ Asterius, *Ekphrasis on the Holy Martyr Euphemia* (Dehandschutter: 174-76).

⁶⁰⁸ Johan Leemans, 'Preaching Christian Virtue: Basil of Caesarea's Panegyric Sermon on Julitta', in Gert Partoens, Geert Roskam, and Toon Van Houdt (eds.), *Virtutis Imago: Studies on the Conceptualisation and Transformation of an Ancient Ideal*, Collection D'Études Classiques (Louvain: Peeters, 2004), 259-84.

⁶⁰⁹ Prudentius, *Peristephanon*, 3, 14 (LCL 398: 143-57, 339-45).

⁶¹⁰ The theological depth of the image of the weak woman martyr is an important point that we must emphasise, especially considering its absence in the negative conclusions of J. N. Vorster, who provides one of the longest studies on early Christian female martyrs. See Vorster (2003), 66-99.

Strength for Struggling Souls

For Augustine, human weakness is inseparably linked to the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*. Weakness is an inherent quality of created and contingent human beings. All human beings must constantly turn towards God, who is the source of their life and being. From his earliest writings, Augustine affirms that weakness is part of the natural state of all created beings. Even before the Fall, humanity was weak by virtue of its complete dependence on the Creator.⁶¹¹ The acknowledgement of weakness reminds human beings that they are part of God's creation. This should inspire humility, and encourage a complete direction of the body, heart, and mind towards God. Augustine advises his congregation not to be proud but to humbly acknowledge their own inherent weakness and realise the true source of their strength: 'O man, cling to God, by whom you were made a man; cling to him, rely on him, call upon him, let him be your strength. Say to him: *In you, Lord, is my strength*'.⁶¹² Everyone must identify with Paul and say: 'When I am weak, then I am strong' (2 Cor. 12:10).⁶¹³

But, while human beings are weak by virtue of their creation, human weakness became more extreme and debilitating after the Fall. As the first human beings turned away from the Creator and towards creation, they moved away from the source of their life and being, they were punished with mortality, and were cast out of Paradise.⁶¹⁴ Distanced from God, human life became a pilgrimage along which the weight of frail flesh pulls down on the soul. The journey through life is an errant wandering: people are delayed on the path as they gape foolishly at little wonders; lustful passions pluck at the garments of their flesh; they become trapped and paralysed by habitual impulses and patterns of behaviour.⁶¹⁵ While the heart yearns to return to God, the mind is distended:

When the mind is given over to temporal pleasures, is always burning with desire and cannot be satisfied, when it is stretched this way and that by all

⁶¹¹ Carol Harrison, *Rethinking Augustine's Early Theology: An Argument for Continuity* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁶¹² s. 97.4 (WSA III/4: 38).

⁶¹³ en. Ps. 58(2).5 (WSA III/17: 172).

⁶¹⁴ For the punishment of Adam and Eve, see, for example, *Gn. litt.* 37, 50-40, 55 (WSA I/13: 458-61).

⁶¹⁵ See further Fitzgerald, 'Habit (*Consuetudo*)', art., in *idem* (1999), 409-11.

sorts of conflicting and miserable thoughts, it does not allow itself to see the good which is uncompounded.⁶¹⁶

Despite such weak helplessness, people puff themselves up with proud delusions of self-sufficiency. But autonomy and independence are only ever an illusion. Perhaps remembering his own conversion as a struggle against pride and the weak flesh, Augustine warns his congregation: ‘If you distance yourself from the help of the Most High you will fall, for you are far too weak to help yourself’.⁶¹⁷ Left to their own devices, human beings move further away from God, and their souls are starved as they nibble at shadows and empty similitudes of nourishment. While they must search for spiritual nourishment,⁶¹⁸ they cannot do this on their own; like hungry babies who cannot find the breast, they must be gathered up in loving arms, held, supported, and guided to the real source of their sustenance.⁶¹⁹

In this state of weakness, fallen humanity is entirely dependent on God’s providential self-revelation. It is because of this that the Word descended to earth and assumed the weakness of the flesh. Like a divine physician, Christ heals infirm humanity with the medicine of grace: by assuming human flesh he become a mediator between God and mankind; his life and teachings reveal the path of humility that all must follow; his sinlessness and innocent death redeem sinners from slavery.⁶²⁰ Like a mother hen,⁶²¹ the Word becomes weak to protect and strengthen his fledglings by sheltering them and raising them up on his wings:

O Lord our God,
grant us to trust in your overshadowing wings:
protect us beneath them and bear us up.
You will carry us as little children,
and even to our grey-headed age you will carry us still.

⁶¹⁶ *en. Ps.* 4.9 (WSA III/15: 90-91).

⁶¹⁷ *en. Ps.* 90(1).1 (WSA III/18: 316).

⁶¹⁸ *en. Ps.* 68(2).17 (WSA III/17: 397): ‘*Seek the Lord*, you needy ones, hunger and thirst for him, for he is the living bread that came down from heaven’.

⁶¹⁹ For an exploration of images of nourishment in the *Confessions*, see Margaret R. Miles, ‘Infancy, Parenting, and Nourishment in Augustine’s *Confessions*’, *JAAR*, 50 (1982), 349-64.

⁶²⁰ See further Rudolph Arbesmann, ‘The Concept of “Christus Medicus” in Saint Augustine’, *Traditio*, 10 (1954), 1-28; Thomas Martin, ‘Paul the Patient: Christus Medicus and the “Stimulus Carnis” (2 Cor. 12:7): A Consideration of Augustine’s Medicinal Christology’, *AugStud.* 32 (2001), 219-56.

⁶²¹ See, for example, *s.* 264.2 (WSA III/7: 227), 305A.6 (WSA III/8: 328); *en. Ps.* 58(1).10 (WSA III/17: 156), 90(2).2 (WSA III/18: 332). The image is Scriptural: Mt. 23:27; Lk. 13:34.

When you are our strong security, that is strength indeed,
but when our security is in ourselves, that is but weakness.⁶²²

This complete weakness and dependence on God is shared by all human beings, including the martyrs. Throughout his reflections on the martyrs, but especially in response to the Pelagian controversy, Augustine affirms that the martyrs were human beings, who shared in *infirmetas humana*. As we have seen in Chapter One, Augustine's martyrs are not the strong and self-assured heroes of the pagan past, but they are weak human beings, who were inspired by grace, motivated by faith, set aflame with love, and enthused by the hope for eternal life. The martyrs were tempted by the sweetness of life, but, with the help of God, they were able to drink the bitter draught of death. They did not accomplish this by their own strength, but they realised their weakness, and prayed to God for the strength to endure suffering.⁶²³ Imitating the Word's humble descent into the flesh, the martyrs descended into the valley of weeping before they were raised up to heaven. All the while they attributed their actions to the strength of God, singing: '*The Lord is my strength* (Ps. 118:14)', and '*Unless the Lord had been in us, they would perhaps have swallowed us alive* (Ps. 124:1-2)'.⁶²⁴ Augustine explains that the martyrs 'were consoled by the presence of his [God's] Spirit, who imparted strength to struggling souls, so that they might escape from the snare of the hunters'.⁶²⁵ God was their helper, he comforted their souls as they suffered, and he held out the hope of eternal life to inspire and console them.⁶²⁶

These brief observations on Augustine's reflections on human weakness draw our attention to two main points. Firstly, weakness is not exclusively limited to women. All human beings, both male and female, including the martyrs, are afflicted with the weakness that is inherent to all created beings, and is especially evident in fallen humanity. Therefore, the weak woman martyr is not alone in her weakness, although her weakness may be greater than that of male martyrs. Secondly, the theological significance of human weakness in salvation history and

⁶²² *conf.* 4.16,31 (WSA I/1: 112).

⁶²³ *en. Ps.* 63(2).2 (WSA III/17: 248), 102.4 (WSA III/19: 82): 'If any [of the martyrs] did weaken, it was because they did not call on the name of the Lord, but presumed on their own strength'.

⁶²⁴ *s.* 299E.1 (WSA III/8: 263), 375B.1 (WSA III/10: 332).

⁶²⁵ *en. Ps.* 118(15).3 (WSA III/19: 409).

⁶²⁶ *en. Ps.* 59.13 (WSA III/17: 191).

the individual Christian life encourages us to be alert to the theological significance of weakness in Augustine's depictions of female martyrs. We should expect more than empty words that simply assume and reflect gender stereotypes. These two important points alert us to be attentive to the theological depth of Augustine's female martyrs. We should keep our eyes open to the deeper meanings that are contained in, and conveyed by, the image of the weak woman martyr.

Making Sense of Weak Women Martyrs

Before we take a closer look at how Augustine depicts female martyrs as weak women made strong in Christ, it is worth noting that there has been very little interest in Augustine's representations of female martyrs in recent scholarship.⁶²⁷ Perhaps the reason for this is to be found in the underlying motives that prompt many scholars to study Augustine's reflections on women. Understandably, his writings on the nature and role of women have been the subject of intense scrutiny because of their lasting influence on Western Christianity to the present day.⁶²⁸ Many scholars approach Augustine with what we might call a "salvage operation"; his attitudes towards women are recovered, restored, analysed, and critiqued, with an eye to discerning their continued relevance and their potential to have a positive influence on the lives, roles, and perceptions of women today.⁶²⁹ This restoration project delves deep into the debris of Augustine's legacy to discover small gems that are cleaned, polished, restored, and perhaps even re-cut, to reflect their former condition so that they can continue to shine brightly in our own present day. Could it be, then, that Augustine's weak female martyrs are thought to be beyond salvaging? Perhaps they are considered to be relics, rooted in a distant past, and meaningful only to those who subscribe to ancient stereotypes of subordination and inequality? Alternatively, is it simply that they have remained hidden and unseen beneath the vast weight of

⁶²⁷ Neither Power (1995) nor Stark (2007) discuss female martyrs in any depth, despite both being substantial monographs on Augustine's attitudes towards women.

⁶²⁸ Stark (2007), 21: 'it is difficult to find a figure of Western thought whose legacy is more contentious and problematic in the views of many feminists than Augustine's'.

⁶²⁹ For the idea of scholarship as a 'salvage operation', see Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'Augustine: Sexuality, Gender, and Women', in Stark (2007), 64: 'Women and men in the Western Christian tradition have suffered for a millennium and a half from the ways Augustine's views on these matters [the body, sexuality, gender relations] have been treated as normative. We need to critique these views, not superficially, but through a deep evaluation of their underlying assumptions, to salvage what is helpful in Augustine's views, freed from the biases that have distorted the humanity of both women and men'.

Augustine's writings and sermons? Or perhaps their presence has been realised, but it is taken for granted as being obvious, and so the process of recovery, restoration, and analysis is deemed unnecessary?

But Augustine's depictions of female martyrs have not been neglected completely. In some studies we encounter brief but insightful comments that suggest the depth of thought that underlies Augustine's depictions of female martyrs. For example, in the context of a chapter on Perpetua and Felicitas, Anne Jensen identifies a number of key themes in Augustine's depictions of the two female martyrs:

Later, Augustine, in his sermons on Perpetua and Felicity, will identify the martyresses with the female sex and make plays on words: their weakness can prove itself strong in battle; while Perpetua is weak in body, she is a man in spirit; the devil, who brought the man down by means of a woman, is now brought down by a woman. Here we see already a contradiction between Perpetua's sex and her bravery.⁶³⁰

Jensen's brief but stimulating comments provide us with a short series of provocative observations related to female weakness, gender stereotypes, and the recapitulation of Eve. But, as the focus of her chapter is not primarily on Augustine's depictions of Perpetua and Felicity, she leaves these remarks tantalisingly unexplored. In this present chapter we take a closer look at the points that Jensen lists, as we try to unpack the significance of these themes for the theological messages conveyed by Augustine's female martyrs. We will be asking both *how* Augustine depicts female martyrs as weak women, and *why* he emphasises the martyrs' female sex; how and why he describes martyrdom as a transformation from weakness to strength; how and why he explains Perpetua's transformation from a woman to a man; why he accentuates the apparent contradiction between the female martyr's bravery and her sex.

Other studies also suggest the centrality of weakness for depictions of female martyrs. For example, in his concise overview of Augustine's reflections on the saints, Robert Eno summarises:

The virtues and the strength of the saints are the gift of God (s. 313.3; 313A.5). "The Lord is my strength" (Ps. 117.14). This is true for all the saints, but is demonstrated in an even more striking fashion in the case of the

⁶³⁰ Anne Jensen, trans. O. C. Dean, *God's Self-Confident Daughters: Early Christianity and the Liberation of Women* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 106.

female martyrs.⁶³¹

Even in these three short sentences we feel the strong pull of a theological undercurrent, as we are swept towards the big questions that preoccupied Augustine throughout his life: the weakness of human beings, whose very being and existence is dependent on God; who can only become strong by humbly acknowledging their weakness; who do not achieve glory by their own merit but are healed and strengthened by the divine physician; whose martyrdom is initiated, supported, and achieved by the working of God's unmerited grace. Regrettably, these theological themes are beyond the scope of Eno's slim volume. But his words do draw our attention to the centrality of grace in all of Augustine's depictions of the saints, and, most especially and emphatically, in his depictions of female martyrs. Throughout the remainder of this chapter, we will pick up and develop Eno's comments by teasing out the relationship between womanly weakness and divine grace. Moreover, we will explore how Augustine's female martyrs illustrate the weakness of created and fallen humanity, and provide the most remarkable revelation of God's redemptive grace. Although they are brief, the comments of Jensen and Eno prompt us to look more closely at the theological depth of Augustine's depictions of weak women martyrs.

Weakness and Subordination?

While this chapter aims to show that Augustine's female martyrs must be understood alongside the theological significance of weakness, first we should briefly mention an alternative interpretation of Augustine's female martyrs: that he depicted the martyrs as weak women in an attempt to reassert female subordination. This interpretation is voiced by Joyce Salisbury, who notes the centrality of womanly weakness as a theme in Augustine's sermons on Perpetua and Felicitas. This theme, she explains, is an example of how the Church Fathers tried to control the memory of female martyrs by silencing them with their own (male) voices: 'instead of letting the text speak directly to the community of the faithful, they guided the understanding of

⁶³¹ Robert Bryan Eno, *Saint Augustine and the Saints*, The Saint Augustine Lecture Series (Villanova University Press, 1989), 72-73. This short monograph is the product of The Saint Augustine Lecture, which Eno delivered at Villanova University in 1985. This explains the brevity of his reflections on female martyrs.

the words, subtly changing the message of the independent young martyr and, perhaps more important, controlling its dissemination'.⁶³²

Salisbury describes how the stories of the martyrs were remembered and retold, modified, modernised, and updated in times of relative peace. This resulted in several important shifts away from the original spirit of the martyrs: Christians do not live in antagonism with the world, but they live as one with wider society; salvation is not achieved through the Holy Spirit in the arena, but through 'subordination to ecclesiastical hierarchy'.⁶³³ These significant changes to the nature of the Church resulted in the need to redefine the memory of the female martyrs.⁶³⁴ This redefinition was effectively a remoulding or reshaping of the martyr's memory: 'Perpetua's text was explained and modified by churchmen who wanted to shape the vision offered by the powerful and personal account of the martyr'.⁶³⁵ Salisbury explains that Perpetua's active role was 'inconsistent with Augustine's strong belief in an appropriate hierarchy in which men led and women obeyed'.⁶³⁶ It is for this reason that Augustine re-presented the female martyrs as weak women, 'taming the independence of the martyr', so that the memory of 'the extraordinary woman' would be reduced to 'a more suitable matron'.⁶³⁷

Salisbury uses this patriarchal model to describe Augustine's depictions of Perpetua as affirmations of traditional gender hierarchies. For example, she interprets the theme of Perpetua recapitulating Eve as a lesson in female inferiority and guilt by association: 'These constant juxtapositions of Perpetua with Eve (which are absent from the text) served to remind the audience that these virtuous women were anomalies in a world that fell due to the actions of a woman, the "sex (that) was more frail"'.⁶³⁸ She does not explore the deep theological undercurrents of the theme of recapitulation.⁶³⁹

⁶³² Joyce E. Salisbury, *Perpetua's Passion: The Death and Memory of a Young Roman Woman* (London; New York: Routledge, 1997), 171.

⁶³³ *ibid.* 164.

⁶³⁴ *ibid.* 165.

⁶³⁵ *ibid.* 170.

⁶³⁶ *ibid.* 174.

⁶³⁷ *ibid.* 174-75.

⁶³⁸ *ibid.* 175.

⁶³⁹ The theological significance of Augustine's comparison of Perpetua and Eve is discussed further in Chapter 5 (*Examples for Women*), below.

Similarly, commenting on Perpetua's vision in which she became male, Salisbury reads Augustine's emphasis on womanly weakness as a reaffirmation of female inferiority: 'Augustine saw the transformation of Perpetua as a divine demonstration showing that women *were* weak and thus only someone "manly" could withstand the kind of testing that had confronted the martyrs'.⁶⁴⁰ Again, there is no mention of the theological meanings that Augustine draws from Perpetua's vision. Consequently, we are encouraged to interpret Augustine's transformation of Perpetua from a strong female *martyr* to a weak *matrona* as a message on the nature of all women: 'In the bishop's hands the accomplishments of the women and the dream of Perpetua served to illustrate a lesson of feminine frailty and imperfection that was wholly absent from the original text'.⁶⁴¹

Many of Salisbury's observations remind us of the first two chapters of this thesis, in which we saw how Augustine's depictions of the martyrs were products of a creative process of reforming memory. Her words encourage us to perceive the image of the weak woman martyr within this same dynamic process. Indeed, in this chapter we will explore this idea further, as we will see how Augustine transformed strong female martyrs into weak women. But, although Salisbury illuminates an important element in Augustine's depictions of female martyrs – the association of female martyrdom and womanly weakness – this present chapter provides an alternative reading. Was Augustine really using the figures of the martyrs to reaffirm the subordination of women in a time of peace? Was he really delivering 'a lesson of feminine frailty and imperfection'?⁶⁴² Was the 'lesson' about women at all? Salisbury's reading seems to mistake the subject of Augustine's sermons to be Perpetua, and, by extension, all women. But a more balanced reading must seriously consider the theological meaning and purpose of Augustine's reflections on female martyrs. If we focus exclusively on womanly weakness without adequately addressing the theme of Christ's strengthening of the martyrs, we ignore the ambivalence and simultaneity of the weak woman martyr, who is at once a *mulier mollis* and a *femina fortis*.

⁶⁴⁰ Salisbury (1997), 175 (emphasis in original).

⁶⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁶⁴² *ibid.*

Womanly Weakness and Female Frailty

So far in this chapter we have seen that, by the end of the fourth century, the image of the weak woman was a common theme in patristic representations of female martyrs. We have also seen that human weakness had a particularly strong resonance in Augustine's theology. In addition to this, recent scholarship points us towards a consideration of the theological depth and complexity of Augustine's female martyrs. With this in mind, we now turn to a closer exploration of how Augustine constructs the ambivalent image of the weak female martyr.

When surveying Augustine's depictions of female martyrs, we find that they display common traits and trends. All the depictions fit into the same interpretive framework of female martyrdom as a transformation from physical infirmity to spiritual strength. For Augustine, all women martyrs were members of the weaker sex (*sexus infirmior*).⁶⁴³ Because of this, they were afflicted with the typical weakness of the sex, (*infirmitas sexus*),⁶⁴⁴ they shared in female frailty (*fragilitas feminae*),⁶⁴⁵ or womanly infirmity (*muliebris infirmitas*).⁶⁴⁶ Beyond this shared womanly weakness, the female martyrs were weakened even further by their youth, enfeebled by their wealthy and luxurious lifestyles, debilitated by the strong bonds of maternal affection, and subjected by filial duty to the power of the *pater familias*. And so, when Augustine depicts the soon-to-be female martyrs, he paints a picture of extreme weakness, which extends beyond the physical weakness of the body, to the forceful assault of natural and instinctive impulses, and even to the emotional turmoil that is caused by conflicting loyalties and fidelities.

Of course, the image of the weak and feeble woman martyr is not a direct reflection of Augustine's views towards real women. (Here we are reminded of the distinction between representation and reality, which we discussed in the previous chapter). We might think of how, in other contexts, Augustine presented biblical women as models of virtue;⁶⁴⁷ he was impressed by the virtuous women in his own

⁶⁴³ s. 159A.11 (WSA III/11: 142), 281.1 (WSA III/8: 78).

⁶⁴⁴ s. 282.2 (WSA III/8: 81).

⁶⁴⁵ s. 281.1 (WSA III/8: 78).

⁶⁴⁶ s. 282.3 (WSA III/8: 82), 286.2 (WSA III/8: 102).

⁶⁴⁷ See Chapter Three, above.

life; he admired the ascetic restraint of widows in his congregation;⁶⁴⁸ he commended the marital fidelity of Christian wives whose husbands were not strong enough to be their equals in fidelity.⁶⁴⁹ Clearly, then, Augustine did not believe that all women were afflicted with a debilitating moral or physical weakness. Even though Augustine's female martyrs display features in common with his general reflections on the nature and role of women, ultimately they are representations, which are constructed by the considered selection and omission of words and details, and include embellishments and exaggerations to convert the tacit into the explicit.

By emphasising the weakness of the female martyrs so consistently, Augustine was trying to implant associations in the minds of his readers and listeners. He wanted to make sure that whenever his audience were to think about a female martyr, their very first thoughts would turn to the interchangeable words *infirmitas* and *fragilitas*, and immediately their minds would conjure up the idea of a weak woman. This becomes the opening picture, the first freeze-frame, which serves as the common starting point from which the interpretation of female martyrdom unfolds and progresses.

Once Augustine has established that female martyrs were members of the weaker sex, he then sets out to surprise his audience by referring to the strength of the female martyrs. The female martyr is both frail (*fragilis*) and powerful (*fortis*); she is weak (*infirmis*) but she fights bravely (*fortiter*); she is a woman (*mulier*) but she displays manly courage (*virtus*). Augustine now paints a picture that is deliberately incongruous with the image of the weak woman. He wants his readers and listeners to perceive the strong female martyr as something unnatural, illogical, and bizarre. He hopes to leave his audience confused, bewildered, and wondering how a member of the weaker sex could also be such a strong martyr.

With this ambivalent image set up in the minds of his audience, Augustine then ventures to provide an answer to the questions that the image provokes. In the

⁶⁴⁸ For example, in one of his letters, Augustine encourages the widow Proba to continue praying so that she can set a good example for her daughter-in-law (Juliana, the mother of Demetrias), and the other widows and virgins in her care. See *ep.* 130.30 (WSA II/2: 199).

⁶⁴⁹ *s.* 9.3 (WSA III/1: 261-62), 392.4 (WSA III/10: 422-24). See also *s.* 9.11 (WSA III/1: 269): 'Christ speaks in the hearts of good women... he speaks inwardly and consoles his daughter with words like this: "Are you distressed about your husband's wrongful behaviour, what he has done to you? Grieve, but do not imitate him and behave badly yourself, but let him imitate you in behaving well"'.

context of his reflections on female martyrs, Augustine is clear that such strength cannot be attributed to the woman herself. He claims that the one and only explanation for the female martyr's possession of such unnatural strength is that she was fortified by the indwelling power of Christ. So, in a sermon delivered at the festival of the martyr Lawrence (401), he tells his listeners: 'none of us should think we are too weak [to imitate the martyrs], when God is actively empowering us'.⁶⁵⁰ To illustrate this point, he appeals to the extreme weakness of the female martyrs: 'For this reason, God wished for there to be people of all ages and both sexes among the examples of the martyrs... Surely it is not possible that even the women relied presumptuously on their own strength? For indeed every person was told, *For what have you got that you did not receive?*'.⁶⁵¹ The female martyr's transformation from extreme weakness to unnatural strength is, then, a forceful revelation of divine presence and a visible illustration of the powerful effects of grace. The example of the weak female martyr most effectively reveals the belief that 'the glory of the martyrs is the glory of Christ going ahead of the martyrs, filling the martyrs, crowning the martyrs'.⁶⁵² Consequently, we find that Augustine's female martyrs guide our attention away from the physical moment of martyrdom and towards the realisation of spiritual truths. Their weakness points to God's strength: their deficiency to his perfection: their dependence to his providence.

Revelations of Divine Truth

At this stage, to help us understand Augustine's interpretive framework, we might like to consider the background against which his female martyrs should be viewed. That is, we should perceive the female martyrs alongside his positive evaluation of the referential quality of creation: the ability of physical, temporal, and mutable creation to reveal spiritual, eternal, and transcendent truths. All the martyrs – both male and female – are part of God's good creation, and, by their very nature as witnesses, they bear testimony to their Creator. Standing in line with the prophets, Christ, and the apostles, the martyrs reveal God's active intervention, presence, and

⁶⁵⁰ s. 305A.2 (WSA III/8: 325; MA I: 56).

⁶⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁶⁵² *ibid.*

power in the world. They are signs that play a central role in God's gracious activity of healing and guiding weak human beings back to the source of all life and being.

Because of this referential quality, there are two different ways of perceiving the martyrs. As with Scripture, we can perceive the literal or historical actions of the martyrs, but we can also discern the figurative or symbolic meaning indicated by those actions. While our perception of the martyrs begins with the eyes of the flesh – which see the martyrs as part of the created, temporal, mutable world – deeper contemplation with the eyes of the heart leads us to discover eternal and immutable truths. As with Scripture, the physical and corporeal elements of martyrdom provide a crude surface meaning, but, beyond the written word, beyond the martyred body, there is a depth of spiritual meaning and truth. This is a matter of perception. So, for example, while our physical eyes find no beauty in a wrinkled, toothless old man, our spiritual eyes perceive the inner beauty of his righteousness and truth.⁶⁵³ The same can be said of the martyrs:

Righteousness has a beauty of its own, which we perceive with the eyes of the heart, and love, and kindle to, a beauty which people have dearly loved in the martyrs, even when their limbs were being torn by wild beasts. Surely we might have supposed that when people were covered with reeking blood, when brutal bites were tearing out their entrails, the eyes of onlookers would see nothing but horror? What was there to attract them in such a scene, except the untarnished beauty of righteousness, which shone out amid the foulness of lacerated limbs?⁶⁵⁴

The physical sight of the martyrs' tortured bodies is repulsive, but the spiritual sight of their righteousness is beautiful and illuminating. Like earthen vessels containing heavenly bread, the bodies of the martyrs are made of weak flesh, but they are filled with the presence and power of God.

And so, for Augustine, the deaths of all the martyrs have a revelatory quality when they are perceived with the eyes of faith. The martyr's physical, corruptible, and weak body becomes the site at which eternal truths and divine strength are made manifest. But this is even more the case for women martyrs. The female martyr's transformation from weakness to strength provides a more forceful, visible, and persuasive revelation of divine presence and power. The image of the weak woman martyr powerfully enduring torture is presented as an unnatural sight. How can a

⁶⁵³ *en. Ps.* 64.8 (WSA III/17: 275-76).

⁶⁵⁴ *ibid.*

weak and frail woman withstand attacks of the fire, the sword, threats to her chastity, the pleas of her parents and children? As a weak woman, such endurance cannot be attributed to her own innate strength, but it can only be explained by the inner working and strengthening power of divine grace. Consequently, the weakness of her body provides a visible and unavoidable testimony to the presence and power of God. While all the martyrs bear witness to God, the female martyr provides the most forceful and compelling case, as she guides our eyes beyond the flesh and towards spiritual and eternal truth.

But why are female martyrs so important? If Augustine believed that all human beings are afflicted with *infirmitas humana*, then surely he could have constructed his depictions of male martyrs to convey the same messages and have the same effects? What makes the female martyrs unique? To answer this question we might turn to an observation that Thomas Martin makes in a rather different context: a study of the role of Paul in Augustine's development of the *Christus medicus* motif.⁶⁵⁵ Augustine was fond of the image of Christ as both the Doctor and the Medicine by whom and through whom all humanity is healed. With this theme in mind, Martin observes that:

the best "advertisement" of physicians' skills would be the unexpected return to health of their most critically ill patients – the more hopeless and extreme the disease, the more incredible the recovery, and the greater the testimony to the knowledge and expertise of the doctor.⁶⁵⁶

Here Martin explains that Augustine presents Paul's conversion as a dramatic recovery that is effected by the medicinal grace administered by Christ. The severe moral infirmity of Paul (Saul) makes his recovery all the more spectacular, with the result that it attests to the power of God's grace, which is able to restore health in even the weakest and most hopeless patients. This observation helps us to explain the uniqueness of Augustine's female martyrs. Paul's transformation from moral infirmity to health runs parallel to the female martyr's transformation from physical weakness to strength. Like Paul, the female martyrs exemplify the most hopeless and extreme cases of infirmity. Like Paul, they undergo a spectacular transformation that heals their infirmity and restores them to perfect health (*salus*). And, like Paul,

⁶⁵⁵ Martin (2001).

⁶⁵⁶ *ibid.* 220.

their spectacular transformation is a forceful revelation of God's powerful and unlimited grace. Of course, there is a difference here: Paul's infirmity is moral; the female martyrs' infirmity is physical. But this difference is also the key. The male martyrs are naturally physically strong, whereas the female martyrs are naturally physically weak. The extreme weakness of the female martyrs makes their case 'more hopeless and extreme'. As a result, their extreme recovery from infirmity to health – their transformation from weakness to strength – is a more forceful and convincing demonstration of the power of God and strength of grace.

We can see an illustration of this idea in one of Augustine's sermons on the Scillitan Martyrs, in which he presents the female martyrs as the most visible and persuasive revelation of God's power and presence:

The strength, the fortitude, of Christ's martyrs, men and women alike, is Christ. If men alone, you see, stood out as being brave and strong in suffering, their courage would be attributed to their being the stronger sex. The reason why the weaker sex too has been able to suffer bravely, is that God was able to make it possible in people of all sorts. Accordingly, be they men, be they women, in their tribulations they all ought to say, *The Lord is my strength* (Ps. 118:14), and *I will love you, Lord, my might* (Ps. 18:1).⁶⁵⁷

This extract is a concise summary of how female martyrs reveal theological truths. While all the martyrs – both men and women – are strengthened by Christ, this is only fully visible in the female martyr. Downplaying the idea of *infirmitas humana*, and exaggerating the idea of *infirmitas sexus*, Augustine draws on traditional gender distinctions to reveal the theological message of female martyrdom. As members of the stronger sex (*sexus fortior*), male martyrs are naturally courageous (*virilis*). Their endurance of torture could, therefore, be mistakenly attributed to their inherent strength; it is not immediately evident that the male martyrs do not rely on their own strength. However, female martyrs are members of the weaker sex (*infirmior sexus*), and so they do not display natural strength (*virtus*). Unlike her male counterparts, the strength of the female martyr cannot be attributed to her natural abilities. The only explanation of how a weak woman could endure suffering bravely is if she was strengthened by an external source. Her brave endurance is necessarily significant and referential, as we are prompted to search for the source of her strength. This is why God enabled women to be counted among the martyrs. Female martyrs provide

⁶⁵⁷ s. 299E.1 (WSA III/8: 263).

the most powerful revelation of human weakness and the most visible demonstration of God's strengthening grace.

Moulding and Manipulating Memory

We have now set out the basic framework into which all of Augustine's depictions of female martyrs fit comfortably. In almost every depiction he explicitly or implicitly refers to the weakness of the female martyrs, and often this becomes the central feature of his depictions, which is crucial for conveying the theological meaning of female martyrdom. This is not only the case for his more abstract references to anonymous groups of women martyrs – the unnamed *puellae*, *virgines*, *conjugatae*, *matres*, *mulieres*, and *feminae* – but also for specific, named martyrs.

Augustine's depiction of Crispina is particularly revealing. He mentions the female martyr in five sermons, which span the first three decades of the fifth century, and two of which were delivered at her annual festival on 5th December.⁶⁵⁸ Crispina is also mentioned in the treatise *On Holy Virginité* (*De sancta virginitate*), which was written in 401.⁶⁵⁹ As is to be expected, Augustine provides longer reflections on the female martyr in those sermons delivered at her festival, but, on other occasions, he simply mentions her name in passing and without any elaboration. This suggests that his readers and listeners already knew the story of her martyrdom. His *Commentary on Psalm 137* gives the impression that her *passio* was read aloud at the festivals, as was often the case at North African martyr festivals. So, considering that Augustine's congregation would have been familiar with the *passio*, it is interesting to find that his depiction of Crispina differs greatly from that found in the account of her martyrdom.

The overall picture of Crispina that is painted by her *passio* is that of a defiant woman, whose words are resolute and uncompromising: 'Whatever happens, I shall be glad to suffer it on behalf of the faith which I hold'.⁶⁶⁰ The *passio* makes martyrdom seem easy. From the very beginning of the trial, Crispina is unwavering. The threats of the proconsul, Anullinus, have no effect on her, except, perhaps, that they seem to cause her slight annoyance or impatience: 'I have told you again and

⁶⁵⁸ *en. Ps.* 120 (WSA III/19: 510-26); *en. Ps.* 137 (WSA III/20: 242-55); *s.* 286.2 (WSA III/8:102); *s.* 313G.3 (WSA III/9: 124); *s.* 354.5 (WSA III/10: 158).

⁶⁵⁹ *virg.* 44,45 (WSA I/9: 98).

⁶⁶⁰ *The Martyrdom of Saint Crispina*, 1 (Musurillo: 302-03).

again; I am prepared to undergo any tortures that you wish to subject me to'.⁶⁶¹ Her responses to the proconsul's threats are summarised in the simple declaration, *quod dicis non timeo*: 'I do not fear anything you say'.⁶⁶² Although Crispina is put on trial, the event is only trying in the sense that it is, at very worst, tiresome. The trial itself is not difficult to endure. As with other earlier Christian *acta* and *passiones*, the martyr gives no indication of an inner turmoil, or the temptation to offer sacrifice. From a Christian perspective, it is fitting that Anullinus calls her 'a stubborn and contemptuous woman' (*dura es et contemptrix*), because indeed she is *dura*; she presents a hard and impenetrable exterior, which reflects her inner strength of mind and the inflexibility of her stalwart faith.

Augustine's depiction of Crispina differs from the portrait found in the *passio*. Perhaps this is only to be expected, considering his views on the trials and temptations of the martyrs: 'if it is easy to face death, what great thing did the martyrs endure in exchange for the Lord's death? What makes them great, what raises them high above the rest of Christians, crowned with fresher laurels? [...] Why all this, if not because death, which they chose to endure for confessing the Lord rather than deny Christ, is of course something bitter?'.⁶⁶³ Bearing in mind these words and some of the themes explored in Chapter One, we can expect that Augustine would be reluctant to reproduce the Crispina of the *passio*: a woman who goes to her death with such extraordinary ease. Crispina's contempt of death is difficult to reconcile with Augustine's wider reflections on martyrdom and the fear of death. If death is so bitter, why was Crispina in such a rush to taste it?

Augustine's Crispina is more complex than the steadfast woman that we encounter in the *passio*. He perceives her through the lens of his thinking on martyrdom in general, and locates her firmly within his interpretive framework for understanding female martyrdom. The resulting depiction is one that emphasises weakness. Crispina not only suffers the fear of death that all the martyrs have to face, but she also experiences the particular weakness of her sex. Augustine interpolates new information into Crispina's martyrdom narrative, as we see most clearly in his *Commentary on Psalm 120*. While the *passio* does not include any

⁶⁶¹ *ibid.* (304-05).

⁶⁶² *ibid.*

⁶⁶³ *s.* 297.3 (WSA III/8: 217).

reference to her social status, Augustine describes her as a rich and delicate woman (*feminam divitem et delicatam*), and a very famous and wealthy woman of noble stock (*clarissima enim fuit, nobilis genere, abundans divitiis*).⁶⁶⁴ In striking contrast with the *passio*, Augustine explains that she was a delicate woman (*delicata femina*), and a member of the weaker sex (*erat illa sexu infirma*), whose wealthy lifestyle may have made her even weaker (*divitiis forte languidior, et consuetudine corporali infirmior*).⁶⁶⁵ This is a completely different Crispina. No longer do we call to mind the female martyr who is *dura et contemptrix*, but now we imagine a woman who is *delicata, languida, and infirma*. In this way, Augustine constructs the image of the weak woman martyr, and sets the stage for us to view her martyrdom as a dramatic transformation from weakness to strength.

By emphasising Crispina's weakness, Augustine makes divine grace central to her martyrdom. He explains that, although she was a weak woman, she was strong (*fortis erat*) because she had the help of Christ. He tells us that, just as the Psalm says, 'The Lord will guard you from every evil', so Crispina had Christ as her protection (*tegumentum, munimentum*), who guarded her from the persecutors (*ille eam custodiebat*).⁶⁶⁶ Despite the fact of her womanly weakness, Crispina was strengthened by the indwelling of Christ: 'Was the enemy ever likely to overthrow one so fortified?'⁶⁶⁷ It was because of this defence that Crispina had been victorious: 'Had the persecutor the power to do anything, even against such a delicate woman?'⁶⁶⁸

Augustine's depiction of Crispina presents us with her transformation from weakness to strength, but it is important to note that she always remains as a weak and delicate woman. Her strength does not come from within herself, but only from Christ. Here the seemingly incompatible combination of weakness and strength are held together by the belief that Crispina was always weak by nature, but that she was strengthened by the indwelling presence of Christ. Just in case anyone should wrongly assume that Crispina had relied on her own strength, Augustine advises his

⁶⁶⁴ *en. Ps.* 120.13 (WSA III/19: 524; PL 37: 1616). For the unique details of Augustine's sermons on Crispina, see the very brief discussion in Frend (1982), 163. See also Lockwood (1989), 172.

⁶⁶⁵ *en. Ps.* 120.13 (WSA III/19: 524; PL 37: 1617).

⁶⁶⁶ *ibid.*: *Dominus custodiet te ab omni malo*.

⁶⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁶⁸ *ibid.*

listeners: 'When temptation comes upon us, let us keep our faith whole and strong... Protect yourselves, but not by any strength of your own, for the Lord is your defence and your guardian'.⁶⁶⁹ And so, while the *passio* presents a defiant and resolute woman, Augustine weakens Crispina to give force to that most crucial of lessons: 'Nobody should rely on themselves'.⁶⁷⁰

Augustine's transformation of Crispina from a strong and independent martyr to a weak and delicate woman reflects his general motivations, methods, and aims for depicting the martyrs. As we have seen throughout this study, Augustine's creative depictions of the martyrs are produced with the assumption that historical truth can and should be subjected to theological truth: that history can be recast and reshaped to reveal eternal and divine truths. But his depiction of Crispina is the most explicit and extreme example of this. He modifies the memory of the martyr to such an extent that she is unrecognisable. The historical Crispina and Augustine's Crispina are completely different women. Here Augustine does not seem to be moulding memory as much as manipulating memory. As he rewrites history, his methods of representation seem to have no boundaries or constraints. This method of depiction has serious implications, which, for us today, might raise a number of ethical questions regarding how we should understand and present the past, especially when that past concerns human suffering. But these questions do not seem to have concerned Augustine. Judging from his depiction of Crispina, he believed that the memory of the female martyrs could be moulded and manipulated to ensure that their deaths were not in vain: that the motivation and purpose of their deaths – to bear witness to Christ – would continue to be meaningful and useful in the Christian community.

Augustine explicitly links two other female martyrs with Crispina, on account of their womanly weakness: Eulalia and Agnes. He mentions the Spanish martyr Eulalia only once in the sermons that we have available to us today: in a sermon delivered at her martyrdom festival on 10th December, in 411.⁶⁷¹ (Considering that Eulalia's festival was celebrated in North Africa, and that Prudentius's *Peristephanon* suggests she was a popular martyr, we can assume that Augustine

⁶⁶⁹ *ibid.* 14 (525).

⁶⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁶⁷¹ *s.* 313G (WSA III/9: 123-24).

would have delivered many more sermons at her annual festivals, but unfortunately these have not been preserved.) Towards the end of the sermon, Augustine describes the female martyr: ‘This Saint Eulalia, from the province of Spain, a *holy and valiant woman* (Prov. 31:10), by her love overcame the weakness of her sex, just like Saint Crispina’.⁶⁷² Here Augustine conveys, in passing, that Eulalia was like Crispina. Both of the female martyrs were affected by womanly weakness, but each one conquered her sex (*vicit sexum*), to become a strong woman (*fortis femina*). This is a relatively short sermon, and Augustine does not go into detail to explain how the weak Eulalia became strong, but his comparison of Eulalia with Crispina encourages his listeners to think of the two female martyrs as members of one and the same category, which is characterised by the weakness of their sex, and is bound together by their transformation from weakness to strength.

Agnes provides another example of the weak woman martyr. In a rather late sermon, delivered on the day of her martyr festival at around the year 428, Augustine forms a similar link between Agnes and Crispina.⁶⁷³ He opens the sermon with one of his frequent explanations of the Greek word *martyr*, followed by the comment that public confession to the point of death is extremely difficult. In fact, he says, some people are so timid and weak that they are afraid to whisper the name of Christ in public. At first, the apostle Peter was like this. He was so afraid that he denied Christ three times. But the martyrs were stronger than Peter, as they confessed Christ even to the death. Furthermore, women too have been stronger than Peter, because they have been counted among the martyrs. Augustine explains that Peter ‘was not yet what a number of women and girls have been, what Crispina and Agnes have been; Peter still was not in the class of these women, with all the weakness of their sex’.⁶⁷⁴ Here again we find that Augustine classes the female martyrs as weak women (afflicted with *muliebris infirmitas*). Furthermore, while Crispina was a woman (*mulier*), Agnes was still only a little girl (*puella*), and yet both were stronger

⁶⁷² *ibid.* 3 (124).

⁶⁷³ *s.* 286 (WSA III/8: 101-05).

⁶⁷⁴ *ibid.* 2 (WSA III/8: 102; PL 38: 1298): *nondum erat quod mulieres quaedam, quod puellae, quod Crispinae, quod Agnes; nondum erat Petrus, quod istarum muliebris infirmitas.*

than Peter, who was a man, the very first apostle, and had remained so close to the Lord.⁶⁷⁵

The Maccabean Mother fits into the same interpretive framework of the weak woman made strong in Christ. Although she was a member of the weaker sex, and was further weakened by the bonds of maternal affection, her actions and words reveal a woman of extraordinary endurance (*tanta patientia*) and inexpressible strength (*ineffabile virtute*).⁶⁷⁶ She was not like most mothers; the persecutor, Antiochus, was wrong to assume that she was ‘a mother like other mothers’.⁶⁷⁷ Although her words were full of maternal affection and family duty (*quam pia, quam materna*),⁶⁷⁸ she was also a very wise woman (*sapientissima mulier*).⁶⁷⁹ She knew that some people are saved openly, while others are saved secretly; that there is a visible deliverance (*liberatio manifesta*), but also a hidden deliverance (*liberatio occulta*).⁶⁸⁰ For this reason, while previously she had suffered in childbirth, later she rejoiced in sending her sons towards eternal life. Unlike most people, who have a weak soul (*anima infirma*), and hope to avoid undergoing the same tortures that the seven brothers endured, the Maccabean Mother was strong, because she knew that her sons were not dying.⁶⁸¹

In fact, the Maccabean Mother is presented in the masculine role of a teacher of discipleship, whose words of encouragement to her sons echo the lessons of Christ: ‘She commanded (*praecepit*), and they followed. What that mother taught (*docuit*) her sons is what the Lord Jesus Christ was teaching (*docebat*) this man when he told him: “Follow me” (Lk. 9:59)’.⁶⁸² Furthermore, the encouragement that she gave to her sons expressed ‘a wish clean contrary to normal human feelings’, as parents do not want to see their children proceed them to the grave.⁶⁸³ Consequently,

⁶⁷⁵ *ibid.* (WSA III/8: 102; PL 38: 1298): ‘Already he was an apostle, he was the first, he was very close to the Lord’ (*iam apostolus erat, primus erat, Domino cohaerebat*).

⁶⁷⁶ *s.* 300.6 (WSA III/8: 279; PL 38: 1379).

⁶⁷⁷ *ibid.* 7 (280).

⁶⁷⁸ *ibid.* (PL 38: 1380).

⁶⁷⁹ *c. Iul.* 5.15,53 (WSA I/24: 466; PL 44: 0814).

⁶⁸⁰ *en. Ps.* 68(2).3 (WSA III/17: 385; PL 36: 0856).

⁶⁸¹ *s.* 286.6 (WSA III/8: 104; PL 38: 1300).

⁶⁸² *s.* 100.2 (WSA III/4: 61; PL 38: 0604). ‘This man’ refers to the man in Lk. 9:57-60, who is prepared to follow Jesus, but first wants to bury his father.

⁶⁸³ *s.* 301.1 (WSA III/8: 282).

her actions reveal a woman more fertile with virtues than with children (*fecundior virtutibus, quam fetibus*).⁶⁸⁴ With striking similarity to his depiction of Crispina, Augustine concludes that the only explanation for such unnatural strength is that the Maccabean Mother had the help of Christ: ‘How have human beings been capable of this, if not because *the salvation of the just is from the Lord, and he is their protector in time of trouble* (Ps. 37:39)?’⁶⁸⁵

Similar ideas are found in Augustine’s early treatise, *On the Catholic and Manichean Ways of Life* (*De moribus ecclesiae catholicae et de moribus Manicheorum*), which he wrote in c. 387/89. Here he sets out to discuss an example of patience (*exemplum patientiae*) drawn from the Old Testament. Rather predictably, he begins by considering the example of Job, but quickly he leaves this behind, and explains that he does not wish to focus on ‘that man, who, though great, though unconquered, was nonetheless a man (*licet magnum, licet invictum, virum tamen*)’.⁶⁸⁶ Instead, Augustine turns to a woman – the Maccabean Mother – as the ideal exemplar of patient endurance. He explains: ‘those Scriptures present to me a woman of astounding strength (*stupendae fortitudinis feminam*) and they compel me now to move to her’.⁶⁸⁷ Augustine describes the Maccabean Mother as a martyr because, when she pushed forward her sons, she was presenting her own body: ‘She surrendered her whole body along with her seven sons to the tyrant and torturer rather than utter one sacrilegious word’.⁶⁸⁸ Throughout the trial, she acted as a teacher, and strengthened her sons with exhortations.⁶⁸⁹ But, Augustine claims, even though her suffering was so great that it could not have been increased,⁶⁹⁰ still her patient endurance is not at all astonishing, because she had been strengthened by the Word of God, and the love of God: ‘Why is it surprising if the love of God, having penetrated to the very marrow of her bones, resisted the tyrant, and her torturer, and her pain, and her body, and her sex, and her feelings? Had she not heard: *Precious in*

⁶⁸⁴ *ibid.*

⁶⁸⁵ *s.* 301.1 (WSA III/8: 282).

⁶⁸⁶ *mor.* 1.23,42-43 (WSA I/19: 51; PL 32: 1329).

⁶⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁸⁹ *ibid.*: *cum eius hortatione filii roborarentur.*

⁶⁹⁰ *ibid.*

the sight of the Lord is the death of his holy ones (Ps. 116:15)? Had she not heard: *A patient man is better than a very strong one* (Prov. 16:32)?⁶⁹¹

The final example that we will mention briefly in relation to the image of the weak woman martyr is that of Perpetua and Felicitas. Throughout his sermons on these popular female martyrs, Augustine presents the two women as members of the weaker sex. In one sermon, he explains that their womanly weakness makes their achievement so much more astounding.⁶⁹² He says: ‘A more splendid crown is owed to the weaker sex (*sexus infirmior*), because clearly a virile spirit (*virilis animus*) has done much more in women, when their feminine frailty (*fragilitas feminae*) has not been undone under such enormous pressure’.⁶⁹³ Likewise, in another sermon, he explains that, despite the presence of some very brave men among the group (*virī fortissimo*), the festival of Perpetua and Felicitas goes by the names of the two female martyrs because ‘it was a greater miracle for womanly weakness (*muliebris infirmitas*) to overcome the ancient enemy’.⁶⁹⁴ Their womanly weakness played a central role in their martyrdom event, and remained as a crucial element in the memory, and commemoration, of their martyrdom.

But Augustine takes this further, as he explains: ‘these two women of such strength of character were not only women, but they were wives as well. And one of them was also a mother, so that to the weakness of her sex might be added feelings less capable of endurance, and thus the enemy could assail them from every side’.⁶⁹⁵ As we found with the youth of Agnes, and the maternal feelings of the Maccabean Mother, Augustine’s depictions of Perpetua and Felicitas are not only weak by virtue of their femininity, but they are made even more vulnerable by the feelings that they experience as wives and mothers.

Yet, Augustine does not focus on Perpetua and Felicitas’s maternal emotions (as he did for the Maccabean Mother), or on their roles as wives,⁶⁹⁶ but rather he is

⁶⁹¹ *ibid.*: *Quid tamen mirum si omnibus medullis conceptus Dei amor, et tyranno, et carnifici, et dolori, et corpori, et sexui, et affectui resistebat?*...

⁶⁹² *s.* 281 (WSA III/8: 78-80; PL 38: 1284-85).

⁶⁹³ *ibid.* 1 (78; 1284).

⁶⁹⁴ *s.* 282.3 (WSA III/8: 82; PL 38: 1286).

⁶⁹⁵ *ibid.* 2 (81; 1285).

⁶⁹⁶ For Perpetua’s husband, see Carolyn Osiek, ‘Perpetua’s Husband’, *JECS*, 10:2 (2002), 287-90. Augustine’s only explicit reference to Perpetua’s husband is in *s.* 281.2 (WSA III/8: 78): ‘it was not

more concerned with Perpetua's role as a daughter, bound by familial duty, and commanded by God to love and obey her father. So, for example, in one of his *Commentaries on the Psalms*, Augustine compares the fear of death with the strength of love, as proclaimed in Song of Songs 8:6: 'Love is as strong as death'.⁶⁹⁷ He explains that, during times of persecution, the martyrs may have been afraid of death, but 'the weeping eyes of their families and friends worked upon them more violently than the hatred of their persecutors'.⁶⁹⁸ He describes the scenes of martyrdom: 'How many were clutched by their children, who did not want them to die! How many saw their wives begging on their knees not to be left widowed! How many parents implored their children not to die! We know this well, and have read about it in the *passion* of the blessed Perpetua'.⁶⁹⁹ Here Augustine explains that Perpetua, and all the martyrs, were able to go towards their deaths, despite the pleas and the tears of their loved ones, because they were 'set on fire with love'.⁷⁰⁰

Augustine mentions the weakening effect of filial duty in greater detail in a sermon that he delivered soon after his consecration as the Bishop of Hippo, in 397.⁷⁰¹ Here he explains that persecution takes two forms: the devil can act like a roaring lion, or a cunning snake; the martyr is not only attacked by the sword, but also by coaxing and allurements.⁷⁰² He explains that, in times of persecution, mothers, fathers, wives, husbands, brothers, or children all have the potential to weaken the martyr's resolve by stirring human affection (*carnalis adfectus*).⁷⁰³ And so, wives have acted as Eves, tempting their husbands away from martyrdom in their desperate attempts to avoid becoming widows.⁷⁰⁴ But, Augustine assures us, in striking contrast to these crafty and cunning women (*dolosae*),⁷⁰⁵ who coax their

her husband he [the devil] introduced into the ring, because she was already, in her exaltation of spirit, living in heaven'.

⁶⁹⁷ *en. Ps.* 47.13 (WSA III/16: 347).

⁶⁹⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹⁹ *ibid.*

⁷⁰⁰ *ibid.*

⁷⁰¹ *s.* 159A (WSA III/11: 135-43; Dolbeau: 288-97).

⁷⁰² *ibid.* 2 (136).

⁷⁰³ *cf. s.* 344.2 (WSA III/10: 50).

⁷⁰⁴ *s.* 159A.7 (WSA III/11: 139-40; Dolbeau: 292-93): *Evam cave!*

⁷⁰⁵ *ibid.* 10 (142; Dolbeau: 295).

husbands with feminine deceit (*femineis dolis*),⁷⁰⁶ there have been some women who were able to endure the assaults of human affection that were provoked by the men in their lives. He says: 'We have been speaking like this, as though it were just men who are hurrying toward martyrdom and being hindered by their wives; let us also reassure the weaker sex (*infirmum sexum*)'.⁷⁰⁷ Here again we find the assumption that women are the weaker sex, but women are to be reassured by the strong actions of female martyrs: 'How many women have won the martyr's crown, and not been overcome by men coaxing them in no manly fashion!'.⁷⁰⁸ Augustine then turns to the example of Perpetua and Felicitas to illustrate this point: 'How did Perpetua become perpetually blessed < ... >? What made Felicitas fit for such infinite felicity, except that she was not afraid of momentary infelicity? So then, for women too to avoid being seduced in this matter by the persuasions of men, let them fix their minds on Perpetua, fix them on Felicitas, and so take hold of perpetual felicity'.⁷⁰⁹

Here Perpetua and Felicitas illustrate how weak human beings, and even weak women, can overcome the bonds of human affection. But Augustine does not explain exactly how Perpetua and Felicitas overcame their weakness. For this, we need to turn again to the later *Sermon 281*.⁷¹⁰ In this sermon Augustine looks more closely at the role of Perpetua's father in the martyrdom event. He explains: 'it was her father whom he [the devil] equipped with beguiling words, hoping that a religious spirit, which would not be softened by the promptings of pleasure [namely, the presence of her husband], might be weakened by the attack of family duty'.⁷¹¹ Augustine explains that Perpetua's father was brought into the arena in order to weaken her even further beyond the general weakness of her sex. But Perpetua and Felicitas were fortified by Christ, from whom they drew their strength (*a quo virtutem traxerant*).⁷¹² Because they were filled with Christ, and had the right order of love, Perpetua and Felicitas were able to control human affection, with the additional result that Perpetua was able to respond to her father in a controlled

⁷⁰⁶ *ibid.* 7 (139; Dolbeau: 292).

⁷⁰⁷ *ibid.* 11 (142; Dolbeau: 295).

⁷⁰⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁰⁹ *ibid.*

⁷¹⁰ *s.* 281 (WSA III/8: 78-80).

⁷¹¹ *ibid.* 2 (79).

⁷¹² *ibid.* 1 (WSA III/8: 78; PL 38: 1284).

manner, so that ‘she neither violated the commandment by which honour is owed to parents, nor yielded to the tricks which the real enemy was practicing’.⁷¹³

A clear framework emerges from these depictions of female martyrs. The martyrs are all portrayed as weak women, who are weakened further by their delicate lifestyles, tender age, marital positions, maternal feelings, and family duties. And yet, their words and actions display unnatural strength, courage, and wisdom. The resulting depiction is the ambivalent image of the female martyr who is simultaneously a *mulier mollis* and a *femina fortis*. The coupling of these apparently contradictory ideas conveys the theological meaning of female martyrdom. The elements are incompatible, but they are co-dependent. The positive and negative aspects of the image must be acknowledged if we are to see the presence and power of Christ filling, fortifying, arming, protecting, and strengthening the female martyrs.

From Weakness to Strength

How exactly does a *mulier mollis* become a *femina fortis*? Augustine explains that weak women become strong martyrs by the power of God’s grace, but how are we to envisage that strengthening process? For the remainder of this chapter we will explore the images that Augustine used to describe the female martyr’s transformation from weakness to strength. Not only will this help us to grasp how Augustine understood the relationship between the female martyrs and Christ, but also it will reveal how he used memorable images to communicate complex theological ideas.

One of the main images that Augustine uses to describe the transformation from weakness to strength is a chaste embrace with Christ. This is most clearly seen in the depiction of Crispina in his *Commentary on Psalm 120*. In this sermon, delivered at Crispina’s festival, Augustine comments on the place of the Psalm within the group known as “the Songs of Ascent” (Ps. 119-133), which are thought to have been sung by pilgrims on their ascent to Jerusalem. Here Augustine reads Crispina’s trials alongside the trials of the individual Christian. Her martyrdom is presented as an ascent of the heart, in which her physical trauma is seen against the grander narrative of the universal need for all humans to lift their hearts and orient their minds towards God with a chaste and holy love. This journey or movement

⁷¹³ *ibid.* 2 (79).

begins with a descent into the valley of weeping: a humble acknowledgement of our weakness and our complete dependence on God.⁷¹⁴ From here, the ascent begins, as the Holy Spirit inspires a chaste and ordered love, and God protects and supports his people on their journey. By acknowledging their weakness and loving God, Christians can make sure that they do not faint, fail, or lose their footing: ‘Charity moves us to walk and make progress; pride pushes us into a fall’.⁷¹⁵

During his discussion on the ascent of the heart, Augustine repeatedly returns to the themes of human weakness and the constant need to depend on God in order to make progress in this life. He paints a picture of the weak and weary body of the Church as it tries to continue on the upward climb towards God. But the Church is not alone. Christ embraces and strengthens her on the journey. Augustine refers to the words of the bride in the Song of Songs: ‘His left hand is beneath my head, and his right hand will embrace me’ (Song. 2:6).⁷¹⁶ He explains that these words are spoken by the bride or *sponsa*, that is, the Church, as she longs to be held in an ‘embrace of fidelity and love’ by Christ, the heavenly Bridegroom or *sponsus*.⁷¹⁷ Christ’s left hand comforts her from below, and his right hand protects her from above.⁷¹⁸ In this way, Augustine sets up the image of the Church as a Bride who is locked in a loving and exclusive embrace with Christ.

But, later in the sermon, Augustine modifies the image. He removes the Church from the embrace and replaces her with Crispina. He describes the female martyr with the same image of a loving embrace. We are encouraged to imagine Christ’s left hand beneath *Crispina*’s head, and his right hand embracing *Crispina*’s body:

The enemy attacked, intent on striking her head, but all that was presented to him was the left hand, which was beneath her head. The head was on top, and Christ’s hand was embracing her from above.⁷¹⁹

⁷¹⁴ *en. Ps.* 120.1 (WSA III/19: 510).

⁷¹⁵ *ibid.* 5 (513).

⁷¹⁶ *ibid.* 9 (518): *sinistra eius sub capite meo, et dextera eius complectetur me.*

⁷¹⁷ *ibid.*: *in amplexu pietatis et charitatis.*

⁷¹⁸ *ibid.*

⁷¹⁹ *ibid.* 13 (524). It is intriguing that John Chrysostom uses a similar image for the female martyr Drosis: *A Homily on the Martyr Drosis*, 10 (Mayer: 201): ‘Christ himself held the martyr’s holy head in his invisible hand and baptised her in the fire as if in water’.

Two things are happening here. First, the figures of Crispina and the Church are linked together, as the female martyr and the Church respond to Christ in the same way. By associating Crispina and the Church in this way, Augustine presents her martyrdom on a wider, ecclesiological scale of significance. Although he does not explicitly present Crispina as a figure or symbol of the Church, her relationship with Christ reflects that of the whole Church body.⁷²⁰ Her ascent, culminating in her relationship with Christ and her attainment of eternal life, is part of a bigger picture: she implicitly represents the united body of the Church; her embrace with Christ is reflected in the sacramental bond of husband and wife; her personal relationship with Christ illustrates that every individual person should hold firm to Christ with humility and love.

Second, the image of embrace superimposes Christ into Crispina's story so that he becomes a (or the) central character in the memory of her martyrdom. By linking Crispina with Christ through the image of embrace, Augustine effectively "unveils" the hidden elements in the story of Crispina's martyrdom, as he reveals the presence of Christ, and discloses spiritual truths that explain her brave actions. We sense that the image is not just that of a female martyr, but of human weakness and divine grace. It is the union of love between Christ and the Church. It is God's relationship with each individual person.

Augustine continues to explain the image of the embrace as an illustration of the right order of love that inspires all martyrs. Christ's left hand (symbolising temporal goods and riches) is out of sight beneath her head, while his right hand (symbolising eternal goods) surrounds her.⁷²¹ Her ascent involved a rejection of temporal goods, which allowed her to enter into a complete embrace with Christ. Exchanging love for love, and life for life, Crispina abandoned her children to attain Christ; she renounced riches to reap spiritual rewards; she forgot earthly fame to glorify the name of God.

But Crispina's embrace with Christ was not just the result of her sacrifice, it was also the cause. The relationship between Crispina and Christ is not just a loving embrace of *pietas* and *charitas*, but it is also a defensive and strengthening hold that

⁷²⁰ This is an implicit link, which Augustine does not draw out or dwell upon. See the comments in Chapter Three, above.

⁷²¹ *en. Ps.* 120.8 (WSA III/19: 517): 'Our left hand symbolises all we have in the temporal sphere; the right hand stands for all the eternal, unchangeable goods the Lord promises us'.

enables her to overcome her extreme weakness. Employing a popular motif of martyrdom, Augustine describes Crispina's martyrdom as a battle (*agon*) against the enemy.⁷²² While Crispina was weak and helpless, Christ embraced and strengthened her:

She was of the weaker sex, perhaps enfeebled by riches and quite frail in body in consequence of the life to which she had been accustomed. But what did all this signify, compared with the bridegroom whose left hand was beneath her head, whose right hand was embracing her? Was the enemy ever likely to overthrow one so fortified?⁷²³

Described in terms of an embrace, Christ becomes Crispina's defence (*tegumentum*), protection (*eam custodiebat*), and fortification (*munimentum*). Because of this, the enemy (*inimicus*) could attack her body, but could not strike her soul.⁷²⁴ Here we find a rather different image of embrace than that in the Song of Songs: while the Song expresses the longing for an intimate union between bride and Bridegroom, the embrace between Crispina and Christ replaces the sensual and emotional longing with the agonistic image of physical and spiritual warfare.⁷²⁵ And yet, while Augustine uses agonistic imagery, he avoids presenting Crispina as a soldier of Christ.⁷²⁶ She is not so much like a soldier, but rather a weak building, which is occupied, guarded, protected, fortified, and surrounded, by Christ.⁷²⁷

⁷²² *ibid.* 13 (524). This motif is prevalent in early Christian descriptions of martyrdom. While its origins are biblical (see esp. 4 Maccabees, Hebrews 12), and its influence is sensed in martyrdom narratives (e.g. *The Martyrs of Lyons*), it was developed even further in the writings of Church Fathers such as Tertullian, Origen, and Cyprian. This is especially the case for Cyprian, who, of course, would have influenced Augustine's interpretation and presentation of martyrdom. In addition to this, we must remember the frequency of agonistic imagery in Paul, which would have influenced Augustine. For the background and use of the motif in Paul, see Victor C. Pfitzner, *Paul and the Agon Motif*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum, 16 (Leiden: Brill, 1967). For the *agon* motif in martyrdom, see Grig (2002).

⁷²³ *en. Ps.* 120.13 (WSA III/19: 524).

⁷²⁴ *ibid.*

⁷²⁵ For Augustine's presentation of the whole of life as an *agon* between the love of the world and the love of God, as exemplified by the martyrs, see *s.* 344.1 (WSA III/10: 49). See also *s.* 156.9 (WSA III/5: 102): 'This is our action; this is our warfare (*militia*). While we are wrestling in this contest (*agon*), we have God as a spectator; when we are in trouble in this contest (*agon*), we can ask for God as a helper. Because if he does not help us himself, we would not be able, I do not say to win, but even to fight (*pugnare*)'.

⁷²⁶ Augustine uses the image for male martyrs, for example, *s.* 276.2 (on Vincent) (WSA III/8: 30), 314.1 (on Cyprian) (WSA III/9: 127); *en. Ps.* 132.6 (on the Donatists as 'soldiers of the devil' compared to Catholic 'soldiers of Christ') (WSA III/20: 180).

⁷²⁷ While the Church Fathers do not generally present female martyrs as soldiers of Christ, Chrysostom and Prudentius do use this image. See Chrysostom, *A Homily on the Martyr Drosis*, 9 (Mayer: 201): 'just as a noble soldier who has dressed himself in bronze armour in fact strikes terror

A similar image of embrace is used by Augustine in his depictions of Perpetua and Felicitas, as he tries to communicate how the female martyrs were transformed from weakness to strength. In one sermon on Perpetua and Felicitas, he says:

They had done well to cling to one man, to whom the one Church is presented as a chaste virgin. They had done well, I say, to cling to that man, from whom they had drawn the strength to withstand the devil.⁷²⁸

Here he explains that the female martyrs clung (*inhaeserant*) to Christ, and drew strength from him (*a quo virtutem traxerant*).⁷²⁹ Unlike our example of Crispina, here Augustine presents the embrace as a kind of spiritual grafting: the martyrs are joined to Christ; he is the source of their life and being; he sustains them, pouring himself out for them, and becoming weak to strengthen them. This embrace is a union and a symbiotic relationship in which Christ becomes weak and sacrifices his life so that the female martyrs can become strong and imitate his sacrifice of humility and love. Augustine emphasises Christ's kenotic outpouring of grace, and the female martyrs' reception of that grace:

The one who had made himself weak for them was shown to be undefeated in them. The one who had *emptied himself* (Phil. 2:7) in order to sow them, filled them with courage in order to reap them.⁷³⁰

Augustine extends the image of the embrace by combining metaphors of spiritual procreation and agricultural harvesting. Christ empties himself (*exinanivit*), spilling his blood like fertile seed, and pouring his strength into the martyrs (*eas... fortitudine*

in the more cowardly of his adversaries with the clanging of his weapons, so too then did blessed Drosis put those powers to flight with the noise of her skin [burning in the flames]'; Prudentius, *Peristephanon* (on Eulalia), 3.32-35 (LCL 398: 144-45): 'With her bold (*ferox*) spirit she made ready to shatter the violent onslaught (*turbida bella*), and with the heart in her young breast panting for God, female as she was she challenged the weapons of men (*arma virum*)'. (It is most interesting that this martyrdom is presented as a battle against men [*arma virum*], which is inspired by a love of death [*mortis amor*]). For a related discussion of the presentation of female martyrs as gladiators in martyr *acta* and *passiones*, see Robert Seesengood, *Competing Identities: The Athlete and the Gladiator in Early Christian Literature* (New York: T & T Clark, 2006), esp. Chapter 6: 'Apelythēsan: Perpetua, Blandina, and the Literary Description of Martyrdom as Athletic Triumph in Early Christian Proto-Hagiography'.

⁷²⁸ s. 281.1 (WSA III/8: 78).

⁷²⁹ In another context, Augustine develops the image of the female virgin locked or fixed in an embrace with Christ, the Heavenly Bridegroom. See *virg.* 56 (WSA I/9: 105): 'He was fastened to the cross for you; hold him tight (*figatur*) to every part of your heart. Let him occupy (*teneat*) in your mind all the room you did not allow to be taken by marriage'.

⁷³⁰ s. 281.1 (WSA III/8: 78).

implevit) so that, once they had grown to the full maturity of faith, he could harvest them (*meteret*) in heaven. The female martyr's transformation from weakness to strength is a union of humility and love, which results in the spiritual conception of life: Christ and the martyr are engaged in the reciprocal act of giving and receiving life.

The embrace of Christ and the female martyr is a bond that reflects the sacraments. As a union of the divine and the human, the head and the body, and male and female, the image of embrace alludes to the union of Christ and his Church. It recalls Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection. Augustine uses the image of the embrace to remind his listening audience that life is only ever found in and through Christ's body; grace is only ever given and received within the Church.

In another sermon, Augustine gives further attention to the relationship between Christ and Perpetua. Without speaking directly of an embrace, here Augustine explains how Christ made sure that Perpetua was not tested beyond her abilities. Rather, he engaged her in visions, drew her away from her pain with a kind of mystical rapture, and strengthened her to drink from the cup of suffering:

He was showing them spiritual delights, so that they would not feel bodily pains, except such as would be enough to test them, not to break them. Where, I mean to say, was that woman, when she was unaware she had been pitched against the savage cow, and when she asked when something was going to happen that had in fact happened already? Where was she? What was it she was seeing, that stopped her seeing these things? What was it she was enjoying, that stopped her feeling these pains? By what love was she taken out of herself, called away by what marvellous spectacle, drunk on what cup?⁷³¹

Here we find a personal, intimate, and loving relationship. Christ is her helper in her time of need. He draws her attention away from bodily pain by revealing 'spiritual delights' and a 'marvellous spectacle'. This is an ecstatic, mystical union. It is a rapture in which Christ pulls her 'out of herself'. By partaking in Christ's cup of suffering, she experiences a spiritual inebriation that disengages her from the flesh and reorients her mind towards spiritual truths. Christ helps Perpetua to overcome the physical weakness of her body by strengthening and inspiring her with visions. Furthermore, Augustine's series of questions direct our own line of vision to those spiritual sights experienced by Perpetua. He asks us: Where was she? Where was

⁷³¹ s. 280.4 (WSA III/8: 74).

she? What was she seeing? What was she enjoying? What was she in love with?⁷³² Perhaps Augustine wanted us to find only one answer to all these questions: she was with Christ; she was seeing Christ; she was enjoying Christ; she was in love with Christ. But, we might also wonder what exactly Christ was showing her. Are we to think of the specific visions recounted in the *passio*? Or perhaps we are to perceive her embrace with Christ as an anticipation of the eternal embrace and the beatific vision that she would enjoy immediately after her martyrdom? Whatever Augustine had in mind, the image of the mystical embrace directs our attention beyond the female martyr, towards Christ, and, ultimately, towards a contemplation of *spirituales deliciae*.

As with the example of Crispina, Augustine describes the relationship between Christ and Perpetua and Felicitas with agonistic images. They are engaged in a defensive and protective embrace during a military combat or athletic contest (*certamen, praelium*).⁷³³ Augustine explains that Perpetua and Felicitas were ‘holding onto the name of Christ in the war’.⁷³⁴ They were triumphant because Christ conquered the devil from within them.⁷³⁵ The praise of the martyrs is ultimately praise of Christ, ‘in whose name they ran the race together with faithful zeal’.⁷³⁶ And yet, he does not develop the motif to present the female martyrs as soldiers of Christ: the female martyrs engage in battle, but it is Christ who fights in and through them; the martyrs are triumphant, but it is Christ who conquers the devil.⁷³⁷ Although *The Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas* relates

⁷³² *ibid.* (PL 38: 1282): *ubi erat illa femina...? Ubi erat? Quid videns...? Quo fruens...? Quo amore alienata...?*

⁷³³ For the martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas as a contest (*certamen*), see *s.* 280.2 (WSA III/8: 72; PL 38: 1281), 281.2, 3 (WSA III/8: 78, 79; PL 38: 1285), 282.3 (WSA III/8: 82; PL 38: 1286). Cf. *s.* 318.2 (on Stephen) (WSA III/9: 148; PL 38: 1439): ‘Those who engaged in the struggle (*certamen*) that far [to death], really did carry the struggle (*certaverunt*) for truth to its limits. This is what is says in the Letter to the Hebrews: *For you have not yet struggled (certastis) against sin to the point of shedding your blood* (Heb. 12:4). The perfect are those who have struggled (*certaverunt*) against sin to the point of shedding their blood’.

⁷³⁴ *s.* 280.1 (WSA III/8: 72; PL 38: 1281): *tenentes nomen Christi in praelio*.

⁷³⁵ *s.* 280.4 (WSA III/8: 74; PL 38: 1282): *Vicit in eis qui vixit in eis*.

⁷³⁶ *s.* 280.1 (WSA III/8: 72; PL 38: 1281): *in cuius nomine fideli studio concurrentes*.

⁷³⁷ Here it might be that Augustine is truer to Paul in his use of the agonistic motif. See Pfitzner (1967), 202. Pfitzner explains that Paul emphasised grace, rather than the strong and autonomous Christian athlete: ‘since the growth of the cult of the martyrs from about the third century onwards there appears a false tendency towards a perfectionism which is decidedly un-Pauline. The martyr-athlete wins the prize not through the faith which he has preserved even in suffering, but through the

Perpetua's vision in which she fights a gladiator in single combat, Augustine introduces another fighter into the ring; Perpetua does not fight alone, but Christ fights within her.

While other Church Fathers depict female martyrs as soldiers of Christ, Augustine does not employ this image. However, one possible exception to this rule is found in his depiction of the Maccabean Mother. He depicts the Maccabean Mother not only as a spectator of her sons' tortures and deaths, but also an active participant in their battles: 'seeing them battling, she was herself battling in them all, herself winning in all of them as they won'.⁷³⁸ Augustine explains this a little further in a different sermon, which does not develop the agonistic theme, but still explains the "ocular martyrdom" of the Maccabean Mother: 'she, by seeing what was done, suffered in all of them... she endured in her eyes what they all endured in the flesh'.⁷³⁹ The Maccabean Mother's role as a spectator engages her in the contest as she fights and wins for Christ. But Augustine does not refer to her as a soldier of Christ. He is clear that she was only able to fight in the battle because Christ was her protection: 'How have human beings been capable of this, if not because *the salvation of the just is from the Lord, and he is their protector in time of trouble* (Ps. 37:39)?',⁷⁴⁰

The third image that Augustine uses to depict the female martyr's transformation from weakness to strength is that of conformation to Christ: that is, how the female martyr's imitation of Christ enables her to become more like Christ. This image is found only in Augustine's sermons on Perpetua and Felicitas, where he tries to explain Perpetua's fourth dream. In this dream, Perpetua was about to engage in battle with a gladiator when she was stripped naked by her attendants and she became male (*facta sum masculus*).⁷⁴¹ We would expect that this apparent gender transformation would have been difficult for Augustine to understand and explain, not least because his depictions of women martyrs emphasise their

merit of his Agon of fortitude and endurance'. Pfitzner does not give examples here, but the most obvious illustration of this is Prudentius's virile hero-martyrs.

⁷³⁸ s. 301.1 (WSA III/8: 282; PL 38: 1380): *videns certantes, in quibus omnibus ipsa certabat; et in omnibus vincentibus ipsa vincebat*.

⁷³⁹ s. 300.6 (WSA III/8: 279-80; PL 38: 1379-80): *illa videndo in omnibus passa est... Ferebat in oculis, quod in carne omnes*.

⁷⁴⁰ s. 301.1 (WSA III/8: 282).

⁷⁴¹ *The Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas*, 10 (Musurillo: 117-19).

femininity. He explains this difficult problem by providing his listeners with a spiritual interpretation of the dream, in which Perpetua's transformation is given theological meaning.⁷⁴² The transformation is linked explicitly with *imitatio Christi*:

The devout mind, though, is delighted to behold such a spectacle as the blessed Perpetua tells us was revealed to her about herself; how she was turned into a man, and took on the devil. By that contest, to be sure, she too was hastening *to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ* (Eph. 4:13).⁷⁴³

Perpetua's imitation of Christ is specifically that of a woman responding to a man. By such close imitation and identification, she becomes Christ-like; the female martyr reflects the male Christ. This image of conformation does not fit comfortably with Augustine's attitudes towards women. As we have seen, he emphasised the femininity of the women martyrs, and he gave a positive evaluation of the continued value of femininity in his vision of the life after death. In short, for Augustine, women do not need to "become men" to be virtuous. So, how does he explain Perpetua's transformation into a man? Gertrude Gillette observes that Augustine's interpretation of Perpetua's transformation was intended to reflect 'her total relationship to Christ'.⁷⁴⁴ By identifying with Christ, participating in his suffering, and sharing in his victory over death, Perpetua becomes Christ-like, even to the extent of reflecting his masculinity.⁷⁴⁵ Gillette explains: 'Perpetua's male body is interpreted as an expression of her final *transformation* into the whole or mature Christ who acts in conjunction with the martyr, taking the lead and directing her in

⁷⁴² Augustine reminds us that it was not Perpetua's body that was transformed into a man, but her soul. See *an. et or.* 4.18.26 (WSA I/23: 550): 'Saint Perpetua saw herself in a dream in which she was changed into a man and wrestled with some Egyptian. Who is going to doubt that it was her soul that was in that likeness of the body and not her body? While retaining its feminine sex, her body was lying in bed with its members asleep, when her soul was wrestling in that likeness of a man's body'.

⁷⁴³ *s.* 281.2 (WSA III/8: 78; PL 38: 1284): *Delectat autem piam mentem tale spectaculum contueri, quale sibi beata Perpetua de se ipsa revelatum esse narravit, virum se factam certasse cum diabolo. Illo quippe certamine in virum perfectum etiam ipsa currebat, in mensuram aetatis plenitudinis Christi.*

⁷⁴⁴ Gillette (2001), 115.

⁷⁴⁵ For the importance of the theme of imitation in the *passio*, see, for example, Alvyn Pettersen, 'Perpetua: Prisoner of Conscience', *VigChr.* 41 (1987), 139-153, esp. 139: 'Her martyrdom was not an isolated episode in her life. Certainly it was the climax of her virtuous life, the final stamping upon her humanity the likeness of her crucified Lord'. See also Thomas J. Heffernan, 'The Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas and the *imitatio Christi*', in *idem, Sacred Biography: Saints and their Biographers in the Middle Ages* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 185-230.

her victory'.⁷⁴⁶ Here we are reminded of that compelling depiction of Blandina, whose body, hanging on a stake, assumes the appearance of Christ on the cross. Like Blandina, Perpetua was filled with the presence of Christ; as she drew from his strength, she revealed his presence and power through her own body. At the moment of martyrdom, the female martyr became an icon.

This conformation to Christ is intriguing. The image of embrace maintains clear distinctions that are central to Augustine's interpretation of martyrdom (Creator/creation, God/martyr, strong/weak, giver of life/receiver of life). But these distinctions are not clearly defined in the image of conformation. The distinctions dissolve. The emphases are weakened. The two become one. Augustine directs the attention of his listening audience away from imagining the naked body of the female martyr, and towards a perception of the body of Christ within her. In this way, he revises the image from the martyrdom narrative. He erases the image of the transformation of a woman to a man, and he replaces it with the image of a female martyr who is one with Christ.

Augustine's explanation of Perpetua's conformation to Christ is a little awkward. We get the impression that he is uncomfortable with the image that is presented in the martyrdom narrative, and this is why he dwells on it directly in his sermon. The image seems to push him out of his comfort zone. He presents Perpetua in a way that is unlike any of his other depictions of female martyrs. He implicitly makes femininity inferior by suggesting that the female martyrs reflect Christ's masculinity in their imitation of him. And yet, the image of conformation is based on the traditional interpretation of martyrdom as an imitation of Christ, by which the martyr becomes one with Christ. This idea is found in another of Augustine's sermons on Perpetua and Felicitas, where he explains that the praise for the martyrs:

resounds supremely to the praise of him in whom they believed, and in whose name they ran the race together with faithful zeal, so that according to their inner self they are found to be neither male nor female; so that even as regards the femininity of the body, the sex of the flesh is concealed by the virtue of the mind, and one is reluctant to think about a condition in their members that never showed their deeds.⁷⁴⁷

⁷⁴⁶ Gillette (2001), 120-21 (emphasis in original).

⁷⁴⁷ s. 280.1 (WSA III/8: 72)

Alluding to Galatians 3:28 ('There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ'), this extract explains that, by their faith and imitation, the female martyrs became inseparably intertwined with Christ. This close identification and conformation goes beyond the image of the chaste embrace. The image is not that of a man embracing a woman, but of the female martyr and Christ bound together as one body. Augustine seems to push his own boundaries to re-present Perpetua's "transformation to a man" as a "conformation to Christ". In this way, he could place Perpetua within his interpretive framework of female martyrdom as a movement from weakness to strength that reveals the presence and power of Christ.

As we reflect on the images that Augustine used to describe the female martyrs' transformation from weakness to strength, we find that the dominant image is that of embrace. On the one hand, this is an image of the personal, intimate, and loving union of a man and woman; a faithful and exclusive embrace that reflects the bond of marriage between a husband and wife. But the image is more than a loving embrace. Augustine describes the embrace as a protective defence in the time of war. The weak female martyr is not a soldier of Christ. She is somewhat out of place and unprepared for the battlefield, and her frail body is unequipped for warfare. But Christ acts as her armour: he embraces, defends, and protects her.⁷⁴⁸ Augustine also describes the embrace as a mutual and reciprocal act of giving and receiving life. The female martyr holds firm to Christ, attaches herself to him, and draws her strength from him. Her evident ability to endure torture and death – a fact that is presented as being beyond her natural ability – reveals her close relationship with Christ. The female martyr is locked in a sacrificial exchange of the giving of love and life. Alongside the image of embrace, we also find the image of conformation to Christ. This is not the dominant image, and Augustine does not appear to be entirely comfortable with it. But still the image of conformation explains the female martyr's transformation from weakness to strength. The female martyr becomes one with Christ. As she imitates Christ, she begins to display not only her natural femininity,

⁷⁴⁸ The agonistic image of the embrace between the female martyr and Christ reminds us of Eph. 6:10-16: 'Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil... take up the whole armour of God, so that you may be able to withstand on that evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand, therefore, and fasten the belt of truth around your waist, and put on the breastplate of righteousness'.

but also the masculinity of Christ. Her body becomes the locus for the union of strength and weakness, male and female, the divine and the human.

The imagery that Augustine chooses to describe women martyrs reflects his own personal, idiosyncratic interpretation of female martyrdom. The images of the chaste embrace, mystical union, defence in battle, and conformation to Christ all communicate his vision of female martyrdom as a transformation from weakness to strength. These are beautiful, rich, and sensitive images of a personal and loving God who responds to individual people, helping them in their suffering, strengthening them in their trials, and relieving their pain. But they are also powerful and memorable images that condense and convey a range of complex theological beliefs: the dependence of all creation on the Creator; the alienation and weakness of fallen humanity; the centrality of the Incarnation of the Word; the importance of imitating Christ's humble condescension; the necessity of God's grace. Augustine uses the female martyrs to convey spiritual messages with visual images: Christ embraces Crispina and holds her head in his hand; Perpetua and Felicitas bind themselves to Christ and draw their strength from him; Christ pulls Perpetua out of her body and helps her to drink from his cup of suffering; the Maccabean Mother is supported and strengthened by God as she watches her sons die. Augustine's female martyrs illustrate that all people must humbly acknowledge their weakness and rely completely on God's gift of grace. They exemplify humility, reveal the right order of love, and express perfect union with Christ.

But the female martyrs also provided Augustine with ways of thinking and talking about martyrdom that would not have been possible with depictions of male martyrs alone. Imagery of the transformation from weakness to strength – whether marital, martial, or sacrificial – relies on the femininity of the martyrs. The female martyr responds to Christ as a woman to a man, as a bride to her groom, as a wife to her husband. She is not only a weak human being who needs divine protection, but she is also a weak woman who needs the protection of a man. As a forceful illustration of human weakness, humility, and ascent, as well as divine power, mercy, and condescension, the image of the embrace encapsulates the whole of Augustine's theology of martyrdom. We might go so far as to say that the image encapsulates his vision of the whole of Christian life. But it is a gendered image. It can only be used to its full potential when the embrace is between the female martyr and the male

Christ. The real force of this most memorable image of the martyrs is unique to Augustine's female martyrs.

Conclusion: Accepting the Ambivalence

Throughout this chapter we have traced the theme of womanly weakness to show that we can only understand Augustine's depictions of female martyrs once we have accepted that they are deliberately constructed as ambivalent images. By emphasising and exaggerating womanly weakness, Augustine drew attention to the power of God's grace. The simultaneous presence of weakness and strength in the figure of the female martyr is effectively conveyed by the related images that Augustine used to describe the martyr's transformation from weakness to strength: embrace, union, and conformation. These images reveal the special power of using women "to think with". Augustine used the female martyrs to contemplate, articulate, communicate, and shape our understanding of our relationship with God, our place and purpose on earth, our particular perceptions of the past, our personal experience of human weakness, and our hopes and anticipations for the future life. Far from being negative assertions of female inferiority, Augustine's depictions of weak women martyrs are profoundly theological images. The female martyrs are presented as part of a positive evaluation of physical creation through which God reveals himself and calls humanity back to the source of their life and being. They are not only attractive illustrations of complex theological doctrines; they are not only useful and popular tools for instructing the flock of the faithful; they are also compelling proofs of the ultimate dependence of humankind on the boundless power of God's grace.

Chapter 5

EXEMPLARITY, IMITATION, AND EMOTIONAL ENGAGEMENT

The theological messages that are conveyed by Augustine's depictions of female martyrs prompt us to explore his use of the images for pastoral purposes. Earlier in this study we observed that images of women are both constructed and constructive. They are built, shaped, and formed with a certain degree of creativity, but they are also intended to build, shape, and form the Christian community. Now that we have seen how Augustine constructed his depictions of female martyrs, we can consider how he used those images to construct and edify his congregations.

In the previous chapter our focus was directed towards Augustine himself: how his theological reflections shaped the way that he perceived and depicted female martyrs. In this chapter we expand our focus, as we add another element into the equation, and consider how Augustine used those images within a pastoral context to guide, instruct, and encourage his Christian congregations. But this division is artificial. In reality we cannot draw such a sharp distinction between theological reflection and pastoral care; we cannot separate Augustine the theologian from Augustine the preacher. His depictions of female martyrs are neither the products of isolated thought nor the work of one lone author. Rather they are embedded in the context of a community. As we have observed already in this study, the majority of his depictions of the martyrs were formed in front of an audience that was not the passive recipient of his words, but its very presence contributed to the formation of the images. And so, the beliefs that are communicated by his depictions of female martyrs cannot be consigned to a world of ideas, floating free and detached from the concrete experiences of human life. On the contrary, they are rooted in the reality of the here and now.

In this final chapter we will explore how Augustine presents female martyrs as models of discipleship and exemplars to be imitated in daily life. These depictions are a natural extension of the wider cult of the martyrs in which the Church Fathers often presented the martyrs as exemplars to be imitated; Augustine is not exceptional in this respect. But we might like to expand on the basic concept of exemplarity and imitation to think more carefully about what it means to present a martyr as an exemplar.

In many ways, the presentation of a martyr as an imitation-inspiring exemplar seems self-evident; it does not present anything surprising or unusual to grasp our attention. Exemplarity might be considered a natural characteristic of all the saints, and imitation a natural reaction to them. But we might like to reconsider this. Throughout this thesis we have drawn attention to the fact that martyrs are produced by the creative process of commemoration, representation, and interpretation. When we bear this in mind, we find that exemplarity and imitation are not natural and inevitable, but rather they are facets of that constructed image; they are artificial emphases that are deliberately woven into the memory of the martyrs to be drawn out in a pastoral context. And so, the way in which a martyr is presented as an exemplar reveals important information about the author/preacher, his audience, and his underlying logic for depicting the martyrs. But, of course, the preacher and his audience may not have been of the same mind. The audience was free to choose whether to accept and receive, or resist and reject, his depictions of the martyrs. Consequently, whenever depicting the martyrs, the main role of the author/preacher was to try to ensure that his audience would receive and respond to his depictions in the correct way.

It is here that Augustine's depictions of female martyrs become exciting. He presents the female martyrs as exemplars by appealing to the emotions of his audience in an attempt to control the way that they would receive and respond to them: the indifferent are provoked towards action by feelings of shame; the disheartened are comforted and encouraged by the hope of sharing in the martyr's reward; the lax are shaken into an awareness that their excuses are not valid; the physically weak are strengthened by the knowledge that virtue is within reach of all Christians. By encouraging emotional engagement with the female martyrs, Augustine tried to make sure that the martyrs would not just arouse external enjoyment, but rather they would elicit emotions that would prompt an intimate and internal response, a spiritual regeneration, moral transformation, and sincere desire for imitation.

Of course, the same can be said for Augustine's depictions of male martyrs. But, when we explore his presentation of female martyrs as exemplars, we find that femininity brings additional nuances to the picture: the rhetoric of gender; traditional gender stereotypes; appeals to the association between women and Eve; reflections

on specifically female roles, such as motherhood; contributions to the debate on the relative goods of marriage and virginity. Furthermore, as we will see, the presentation of female martyrs as exemplars was not directed only to the women in the audience, but also had a particularly powerful ability to engage the emotions of Augustine's male listeners. And so, while the main interlocking themes of this chapter are exemplarity, imitation, and emotional engagement, we will find that, for Augustine's female martyrs, these themes are bound together and strengthened by the common thread of femininity.

Exemplarity and Imitation

Exemplary depictions of martyrs were a central part of commemoration and representation in the early Christian cult of the martyrs. As Johan Leemans has shown, martyr festivals were 'schoolrooms for the soul': educational sites where Christians learnt spiritual and moral lessons through the martyrs.⁷⁴⁹ Leemans explains that the underlying motivation of those Church Fathers who depicted the martyrs 'was not descriptive but exhortatory: to present the martyr's life and death as an example of Christian virtue worthy of imitation'.⁷⁵⁰ Commemoration of the martyrs was a forward-looking process that helped to construct identity and beliefs in the present and the future. As Leemans explains, commemoration was 'active remembrance, intended to motivate people to follow in the footsteps of the person who functions as an example of virtue'.⁷⁵¹ When perceived in this way, depictions of martyrs are seen as elementary exercises, as parts of an 'educational process',⁷⁵² in which the martyrs provided paradigms of virtue that served as templates against which individual Christian lives could be compared, structured, and shaped. The martyr's ordeal becomes the Christian's ordeal; the martyr's words become the Christian's words; the martyr's faith becomes the Christian's faith. In short, the process of identification and imitation enables Christians to *become* martyrs.

⁷⁴⁹ Johan Leemans, "'Schoolrooms for our Souls": The Cult of the Martyrs: Homilies and Visual Representations as a Locus for Religious Education in Late Antiquity', in *Paedagogica Historica*, 36 (2000), 113-27.

⁷⁵⁰ Leemans (2005b), 46-47.

⁷⁵¹ *ibid.* 62.

⁷⁵² *ibid.* 64.

Augustine also draws attention to the exemplary function of the martyrs, and the need for all Christians to imitate them. The dominant metaphor that he uses to describe this scheme of exemplarity and imitation is that of following in the footsteps of the martyrs, a metaphor developed from 1 Peter 2:21: ‘Christ suffered for us, leaving us an example, so that we might follow in his footsteps’.⁷⁵³ Augustine explains that the path to eternal life was first laid down by Christ. Now all Christians must follow in his footsteps by imitating his actions: ‘in acting out the role, treading in their master’s footsteps’.⁷⁵⁴ By paving the path of suffering, Christ gave an example for his martyrs to imitate:

The Lord Jesus not only gave his martyrs their instructions, he also strengthened them by his example. I mean, that they might have something to follow when they were about to suffer, he first suffered for them; he pointed out the journey to be made, he made the road along which to make it.⁷⁵⁵

The martyrs provide the most literal example of the imitation of Christ: ‘The holy martyrs followed him, to the shedding of their blood, to the similarity of their sufferings’.⁷⁵⁶ The martyrs’ literal imitation of Christ is most clearly illustrated by the example of Stephen the proto-martyr:

Like a good sheep, he followed in the footsteps of his shepherd... Observe the man following in his Lord’s footsteps. Christ on the cross: *Father, into your hands I commend my spirit* (Lk. 23:46); Stephen under the hail of stones: *Lord Jesus, receive my spirit* (Acts 7:59). Christ on the cross: *Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing* (Lk. 23:34); Stephen under the hail of stones: *Lord Jesus, do not hold this sin against them* (Acts 7:60). How could this man not be where the one he had followed was, where the one he had imitated was?⁷⁵⁷

As the martyrs followed Christ, they smoothed the path of suffering to make it easier for others to follow.⁷⁵⁸ Augustine explains that now anyone who wishes to arrive at eternal life can choose to imitate the martyrs: ‘Follow in Stephen’s

⁷⁵³ Quoted in s. 304.2 (WSA III/8: 316).

⁷⁵⁴ s. 37.16 (WSA III/2: 193). For following in Christ’s footsteps, see also *virg.* 27,27-28,28 (WSA I/9: 84-86); s. 9.3 (WSA III/1: 262), 284.6 (WSA III/8: 91), 304.2 (WSA III/8: 316).

⁷⁵⁵ s. 273.1 (WSA III/8: 17).

⁷⁵⁶ s. 304.2 (WSA III/8: 316).

⁷⁵⁷ s. 319.4-5 (WSA III/9: 153).

⁷⁵⁸ s. 302.7 (WSA III/8: 304), 306B.1 (WSA III/9: 28), 325.1 (WSA III/9: 167), 345.6 (WSA III/10: 64).

footsteps, any of you that desires a crown'.⁷⁵⁹ In fact, Augustine is insistent that imitation is the only correct and proper way of celebrating the memory of the martyrs: 'Let us follow in the footsteps of the martyrs by imitating them, or else we will be celebrating their festivities to no purpose [...]. I have always admonished you about this, brothers and sisters, I have never stopped doing so, never kept quiet about it'.⁷⁶⁰ This final sentence is not an exaggeration; the message resonates throughout his sermons on the martyrs:

[T]he right way to celebrate the festivals of the martyrs should be by imitating their virtues. It is easy enough to celebrate in honour of a martyr; the great thing is to imitate the martyr's faith and patience.⁷⁶¹

[I]t is easy to celebrate the feasts of the martyrs; it is difficult to imitate the martyrs' sufferings.⁷⁶²

[The martyrs] have no need of our festivities, because they are rejoicing in heaven with the angels; but they also rejoice together with us, not if we honour them, but if we imitate them. But to honour and not imitate them is nothing more nor less than false flattery. So this is why these feasts have been instituted in the Church of Christ; it's so that by them the congregation of Christ's members may be admonished to imitate Christ's martyrs. That is absolutely the value of this festivity, there is not any other at all.⁷⁶³

For Augustine, the one and only function of commemorative feasts is exhortation: the martyrs are exemplars that must be imitated in daily life. But imitation is not an autonomous decision or act. Christians must pray for intercession and assistance from the martyrs themselves: 'May the holy martyrs pray for us that we should not only celebrate their feasts but also imitate their virtues'.⁷⁶⁴ They must also pray to God for the gift of his strengthening grace: 'exult and rejoice on the days of the holy martyrs; pray that you may be able to follow in the footsteps of the martyrs'.⁷⁶⁵ The martyrs cannot be imitated without the assistance of God's grace.

⁷⁵⁹ s. 314.2 (WSA III/8: 127).

⁷⁶⁰ s. 302.1, 9 (WSA III/8: 300, 304).

⁷⁶¹ s. 311.1 (WSA III/9: 71).

⁷⁶² s. 313A.1 (WSA III/9: 90).

⁷⁶³ s. 325.1 (WSA III/9: 167).

⁷⁶⁴ s. 299F.4 (WSA III/8: 273).

⁷⁶⁵ s. 273.9 (WSA III/8: 21).

After all, the martyrs were only victorious because they themselves had been strengthened by grace.⁷⁶⁶

Considering that Augustine makes imitation essential for the proper commemoration of the martyrs, it is intriguing, then, that he does not give many details of how exactly Christians might imitate the martyrs in times of relative peace. So Peter Brown comments: ‘when it came to the issue as to how exactly each individual saint might be imitated, Augustine remained gloriously unspecific’.⁷⁶⁷ Brown observes that there are some exceptions to this rule, and the two exceptions that he lists are, notably, related to female martyrs:

Apart from the occasional praise of women martyrs, so as to shame the men and to prove that any woman might expect to enjoy the full measure of God’s grace; apart, also, from a pointed reference to martyrs who had been married women and mothers of children, so as to rebuke nuns who were tempted to despise married persons, Augustine never offered the behaviour of any specific saint for imitation by any specific group. He felt that he did not need to do so. All the faithful should admire and imitate all the saints, for they all had faced the same basic struggle as they faced themselves.⁷⁶⁸

We will return to explore these exceptional functions of female martyrs later in this chapter, but for now it is worth highlighting Brown’s observation that Augustine does not give specific details as to how a particular group might imitate a particular martyr. Having said this, Augustine does occasionally provide more detail as to how the martyrs might be imitated by all Christians: a person might imitate the martyrs by resisting superstitious remedies while on their death bed;⁷⁶⁹ all should imitate the martyrs’ rejection of temporal pleasures by not becoming drunk at martyr festivals;⁷⁷⁰ Christians should imitate the martyrs by placing hope in eternal goods, not temporal riches.⁷⁷¹ But, as Peter Brown mentions, Augustine’s insistence on imitation was more of a general instruction for all Christians to perceive their own lives in the same light and purpose as the spiritual struggles of all the martyrs.

⁷⁶⁶ s. 285.1 (WSA III/8: 95).

⁷⁶⁷ Brown (2000b), 12.

⁷⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁶⁹ s. 4.36 (WSA III/1: 205-06), 286.7 (WSA III/8: 105), 318.3 (WSA III/9: 149), 335D.3 (WSA III/9: 230-31).

⁷⁷⁰ s. 64.8 (WSA III/3: 186), 198.9 (WSA III/11:187), 326.1 (WSA III/9: 170), 335D.2 (WSA III/9: 229).

⁷⁷¹ s. 345 (WSA III/9: 58-66), 311.3 (WSA III/9: 72); *en. Ps.* 29(2).9 (WSA III/15: 308).

And yet, just as Brown draws our attention to two exceptions to this rule, we might want to investigate whether there are any other exceptions, or, at least, nuances, that are present in Augustine's depictions of female martyrs. Can we add detail to Brown's observation that Augustine used depictions of female martyrs in different ways for men and women: to shame men, and inspire women? Do Augustine's depictions of female martyrs contain any suggestions of how women ought to imitate the martyrs in their daily lives? These questions will be explored throughout this chapter as we look more closely at how Augustine depicts female martyrs as exemplars for both men and women.

But before we turn to the specific example of female martyrs, first we should consider a fundamental problem. No matter how frequently and insistently Augustine exhorted his listeners to imitate the martyrs, his words would have been futile unless they could affect and excite the audience to share in his own enthusiasm for imitation. How, then, did Augustine make his message heard? How did he incite and motivate his audience towards imitating the martyrs? To answer these questions we must consider the role of the emotions.

Engaging the Emotions

As a previous professor of rhetoric and a thoughtful preacher, Augustine was acutely aware of the centrality of the emotions for the art of persuasion and effective edification. Augustine was heir to a long tradition that greatly esteemed the role of the emotions in rhetoric. At around the year 330 B.C.E., Aristotle composed his treatise, *Rhetoric*, in which he reflected on the role of the emotions in the context of rhetoric. In the first book of this work, he sets out the three methods or means of persuasion: *ethos* (moral character); *pathos* (emotional appeal); *logos* (rational argument).⁷⁷² The second of these – *pathos* – relates to the arousal of strong emotions (*pathē*). Aristotle works with the definition of the emotions as 'all those affections which cause men to change their opinion in regard to their judgements, and are accompanied by pleasure and pain; such as anger, pity, fear, and all similar emotions and their contraries'.⁷⁷³ A person's emotional state has a direct influence on their decisions and judgements. Aristotle explains that it is this link between

⁷⁷² Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1.2,1356a.3 (LCL 193: 17).

⁷⁷³ *ibid.* 2.1,1378a.8 (173).

emotions and judgments that is exploited by the art of persuasion: ‘The orator persuades by means of his hearers, when they are roused to emotion by his speech; for the judgments we deliver are not the same when we are influenced by joy or sorrow, or love or hate; and it is to this alone that, as we have said, the present-day writers of [rhetorical] treatises endeavour to devote their attention’.⁷⁷⁴

Aristotle’s emphasis on the association between the emotions and persuasion was expanded by later authors of rhetorical handbooks, most especially Cicero (106-43 B.C.E.) and Quintilian (c. 40-96 C.E.). While Cicero avoids the words *ethos* and *pathos*, his treatise *On the Ideal Orator* emphasises the function of the emotions for the art of persuasion. Cicero presents the art of persuasion as being dependent on the orator’s skill of controlling and directing the emotions of his audience: ‘everyone knows that the power of an orator is most manifest in dealing with people’s feelings, when he is stirring them to anger or to hatred and resentment, or is calling them back from these same emotions to mildness and compassion’.⁷⁷⁵ Cicero presents the kindling and quenching of the emotions as ‘precisely the thing most essential for an orator’.⁷⁷⁶ The ideal orator is so skilled in his art that he ‘is able, through speech, to arouse or calm in people’s hearts any emotion that the circumstances and the case demand’.⁷⁷⁷ In this same work, he elaborates on the three main aims of oratory, that is, *probare*, *delectare*, and *flectere*: ‘proving that our contentions are true, winning over our audience, and inducing their minds to feel any emotion the case may demand’.⁷⁷⁸ These three aims, aligned with Aristotle’s three means of persuasion (*logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*) clearly give an important role to the emotions. The orator’s appeal to the emotions is described as a process of manipulating the minds of the audience: pulling and dragging their minds into line with that of the speaker;⁷⁷⁹ moulding and shaping their minds as with potters’ hands.⁷⁸⁰ In many cases, this is a

⁷⁷⁴ *ibid.* 1.2,1356a.5 (17). See also David Konstan, ‘Rhetoric and Emotion’, in Ian Worthington (ed.), *A Companion to Greek Rhetoric*, Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World (Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 411-25.

⁷⁷⁵ Cicero, *On the Ideal Orator*, 1.53 (May and Wisse: 70).

⁷⁷⁶ *ibid.* 1.60 (72).

⁷⁷⁷ *ibid.* 1.202 (107).

⁷⁷⁸ *ibid.* 2.115 (153-54).

⁷⁷⁹ *ibid.* 2.176 (169).

⁷⁸⁰ *ibid.* 2.187 (172).

matter of diverting attention *away* from the truth: ‘nothing’, says Cicero’s Antonius, ‘is more important than for the orator to be favourably regarded by the audience, and for the audience itself to be moved in such a way as to be ruled by some strong emotional impulse rather than by reasoned judgment... under the influence of hate or affection or partiality or anger or grief or joy or hope or fear or delusion or some other emotion, than on the basis of the truth’.⁷⁸¹

Slightly modifying Cicero, Quintilian presents the three aims of rhetoric as *docere*, *delectare*, and *movere*. Of these aims, *movere* – the movement of the mind by arousing the emotions – is identified as the most important: emotional appeals are ‘the most powerful means of securing our aims’.⁷⁸² He says: ‘the life and soul of oratory, we must say, is in the emotions’.⁷⁸³ Quintilian aligns the three aims of rhetoric with three styles of speech: the plain, the intermediate, and the grand. The grand style of speech is most closely associated with the aim *movere* and its appeal to the emotions. He explains that the grand style is as strong as ‘the river that can roll rocks along, scorn the bridge, and create its own banks’; it ‘will carry the judge away with its mighty torrent however much he resists; it will force him to go wherever it takes him... he will follow the speaker, now in one direction, now in another, and never feel the need of being given the facts’.⁷⁸⁴ By engaging the emotions, the grand style of speech dispels indifference and forces the audience to take a personal interest in the case, but, most importantly, to pay no attention to truth: ‘as soon as they begin to be angry or to feel favourably disposed, to hate or to pity, they fancy that it is now their own case that is being pleaded, and just as lovers cannot judge beauty because their feelings anticipate the perception of their eyes, so also a judge who is overcome by his emotions gives up any idea of inquiring into truth; he is swept along by the tide, as it were, and yields to the swift current’.⁷⁸⁵

The close association between rhetoric and the emotions continued into the Christian tradition, as is only to be expected considering that most of the Church

⁷⁸¹ *ibid.* 2.178 (170).

⁷⁸² Quintilian, *On Teaching Oratory*, 6.2.1 (LCL 126: 45).

⁷⁸³ *ibid.* 6.2.7 (LCL 126: 49).

⁷⁸⁴ *ibid.* 12.10.58-62 (LCL 494: 313-15).

⁷⁸⁵ *ibid.* 6.2.6 (LCL 126: 47).

Fathers were products of the classical education system.⁷⁸⁶ However, here the focus shifted away from demonstrations of the eloquence, skill, and persuasive power of the preacher, and towards revelations of the truth of Scripture.⁷⁸⁷ This is most evident in homilies, and especially Greek martyr homilies, where oratorical style was considered to be essential for communicating the meaning of Scripture and effecting the proper response.⁷⁸⁸ Here there is no sense of pulling, dragging, or manipulating minds. Christian rhetoric did not aim to divert the mind away from truth, but to help to reveal truth to the mind. On the related issue of the relationship between style and substance, George A. Kennedy comments: ‘We need not charge such thoughtful Christians as Gregory [of Nazianzus] or Chrysostom with pandering to the mob, but they were concerned with moving the hearts of their audience and inspiring their lives, and the devices of sophistic rhetoric had become the cues to which their audiences responded and by which their purposes could be best accomplished’.⁷⁸⁹ Among the ‘purposes’ referred to here are, of course, the revelation of Christian truth, the formation of Christian identity, and the promotion of Christian ethics. And so we find that emotional engagement had an important function in Christian teaching. Appeals to the emotions helped to ensure that the audience would be properly prepared and predisposed to receive, understand, and respond to the word of God.

The power of appealing to the emotions of an audience was not lost on Augustine. His appreciation of the importance of emotional engagement is most clearly seen in his handbook *On Christian Teaching*. Here he explains that, while he does not wish to set out the principles of rhetoric, he does believe that Christians should make use of rhetorical techniques so that they would be equipped with the necessary skills for the effective communication and convincing defence of Christian truth.⁷⁹⁰ There is no reason, he says, for Christians to resign themselves to dull methods of teaching while their opponents are busy ‘pushing and propelling their

⁷⁸⁶ For the Christian use of *ethos*, *pathos* (especially fear and love), and *logos*, see John G. Cook, ‘The Protreptic Power of Early Christian Language: From John to Augustine’, *VigChr.* 48 (1994), 105-34.

⁷⁸⁷ Kennedy (1980), 132-38.

⁷⁸⁸ Johan Leemans, ‘Style and Meaning in Gregory of Nyssa’s Pangeyrics on Martyrs’, *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovaniensis*, 81 (2005), 109-29.

⁷⁸⁹ Kennedy (1980), 145.

⁷⁹⁰ *doc. Chr.* 4 (Green: 101).

listeners' minds towards error... to inspire fear, sadness, and elation, and issue passionate exhortations'.⁷⁹¹ Rather, Christian teachers can be aided by eloquence. They must 'communicate what is good and eradicate what is bad, and in this process of speaking must win over the antagonistic, rouse the apathetic'.⁷⁹² While the teacher of truth might find his audience 'favourable, interested, and receptive',⁷⁹³ it is more likely that his audience will need to be moved before it can be instructed: 'in order to make them act decisively on the knowledge that they have and lend their assent to matters which they admit to be true'.⁷⁹⁴ When faced with an apathetic audience, the teacher must deliver 'entreaties, rebukes, rousing speeches, solemn admonitions, and all the other things which have the power to excite human emotions'.⁷⁹⁵ For Augustine, emotional engagement is necessary to prepare the audience, grasp their attention, and inspire them to listen and value and respond to the spoken words.

Like Quintilian, Augustine identifies the method of arousing the emotions with the 'grand style' of speech: a style that moves the audience to share the hopes, fears, joys, and sorrows of the speaker.⁷⁹⁶ He explains that, while the three aims of rhetoric (*docere, delectare, movere* or *flectere*) are closely linked, the grand style of speech is particularly suited for the purpose of *movere* or *flectere*: 'when action must be taken and we are addressing those who ought to take it but are unwilling, then we must speak of what is important in the grand style, the style suitable for moving minds to action'.⁷⁹⁷ It is this style of speech that Augustine employs regularly in his exhortations towards imitation of the martyrs. His main concern with the cult of the martyrs was that many people attended martyr festivals to delight in awesome stories of victory and revel in exuberant celebrations of life over death, but closed their ears to the lessons of the martyrs, and closed their hearts to the spiritual transformation that stories of the martyrs should effect.⁷⁹⁸ By appealing to the emotions of his

⁷⁹¹ *ibid.* (102).

⁷⁹² *ibid.* (103).

⁷⁹³ *ibid.*

⁷⁹⁴ *ibid.* (104).

⁷⁹⁵ *ibid.*

⁷⁹⁶ *ibid.* 4.12 (118).

⁷⁹⁷ *ibid.* 4.19 (125).

⁷⁹⁸ See, for example, *ep.* 22 to Aurelius (WSA II/1: 58-60).

audience, Augustine prompts his listeners towards a personal engagement with the martyrs, ‘not to make known to them what they must do, but to make them do what they already know must be done’, that is, to imitate the martyrs.⁷⁹⁹ In the context of preaching, the figures of the martyrs carry great affective power. By engaging the emotions, they grasp the attention of the audience, elicit a personal response to their stories, and effect a change in attitudes, beliefs, and actions.

While it is beyond the scope of this study to go into detail on Augustine’s theory of the emotions, it is worth highlighting some of the most important points here to give us a better understanding of what he was doing when he used depictions of female martyrs to engage the emotions of his listeners.⁸⁰⁰ As James Wetzel comments, Augustine’s reflections on the emotions only make sense once we consider their place in the context of his theology. Wetzel claims that, when seen in the broader classical context of reflection on emotion, Augustine’s own contribution seems to be ‘disappointingly derivative’.⁸⁰¹ Although we might question this conclusion – we should not deny the importance of the fact that he accepted and modified the rhetorical methods that were available to him – rhetoric takes us only so far. The rhetorical method of *pathos* was intended to move the audience, but, in the context of rhetoric, the desired movement took place irrespective of truth, as it was based entirely on the persuasive skill of the orator. For Augustine, however, the movement effected by *pathos* concerned the soul: the emotions (*affectiones*) are expressions of the orientation, direction, and movement of the will. Individual emotions cannot be divided into positive and negative categories: positive emotions express the right movement of the will, while negative emotions express the disordered movement of the will; positive emotions are linked with *caritas*, while negative emotions are linked with *cupiditas*; positive emotions are associated with

⁷⁹⁹ *doc. Chr.* 4.12 (Green: 118). One example of this is found in Augustine’s *ep* 29 to Alypius (WSA II/1: 95-100). Here Augustine appeals to the emotions of his audience to persuade them against the *laetitia*: the drunken celebration held in memory of the martyr Leontius. Augustine particularly rouses the emotions of shame (for their carnal actions and dissent), fear (of the final judgment), and pity (for Augustine himself, as he is ultimately accountable for their actions). His listeners respond to his emotional appeals by weeping, thus giving him a physical indication of their inner change. Finally, Augustine explains that his words had the desired effect: ‘I saw that all were with singleness of heart beginning to have a good will and had rejected their bad habit’.

⁸⁰⁰ For a closer analysis of the emotions, see James Wetzel, ‘Augustine’, in John Corrigan (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Emotion* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 349-63.

⁸⁰¹ *ibid.* 349.

humility, while negative emotions are associated with pride. By engaging the emotions of his listeners, Augustine tried to reorient the disorderly will, inspire a movement from *cupiditas* to *caritas*, and temper pride by inciting humility. The inner movement that was effected through emotional engagement would, therefore, become the first step that leads to an outer change in action and lifestyle. But, we might ask, if the emotions are an expression of the movement of the will, and the will is only ever prepared and moved by the grace of God, what is Augustine's role in engaging the emotions of his listeners? Yet, as we will see, Augustine constructed and employed depictions of the female martyrs with the clear intention of exciting the emotions and inspiring imitation.

Blush for Shame, Bearded Men!

The most interesting presentation of female martyrs as exemplars is found on those occasions when Augustine specifically addresses the men in his audience. Throughout this thesis we have found that Augustine makes femininity central to his depictions of women martyrs. How, then, were Christian men meant to perceive female martyrs as exemplars, relate to their distant and gendered experiences, and imitate their actions in daily life? On the one hand, imitation of female martyrs is no different from imitation of male martyrs. Augustine expected all Christians to imitate the spiritual journey of the female martyr: her descent into the valley of tears; her acknowledgement of human weakness; the reorientation of her heart towards eternal goods; her complete dependence on God's strengthening grace; her hope for eternal life. This internal imitation concerns the soul. Sex and gender are irrelevant. But, on the other hand, femininity is a crucial element in the identity of the female martyr, the trials that she faces, and her response to those trials. As we have seen, female martyrs are most often characterised by their innate womanly weakness, their trials typically involve abandoning their children or disobeying the authority of their fathers, and their response is often marked by action that is meaningful insofar as it questions the nature and role of women in the family, society, and nature as a whole. Clearly, literal imitation was out of the question for the men in Augustine's

congregations.⁸⁰² The examples of the female martyrs needed to be translated, updated, and interpreted before they could have meaning for Christian men.

So, how did Augustine present female martyrs as exemplars for the men in his congregations? The key to answering this question is not to focus on *how* men were to imitate the martyrs, but on how they must *want* to imitate them. Augustine used the female martyrs to incite the desire for imitation. It is here that our comments on exemplarity, imitation, and emotional engagement become important. Augustine's depictions of female martyrs are characterised by their intended function to stir negative emotions of shame in order to provoke apathetic and complacent men towards moral action through imitation. But before we look at how he does this, it would be useful to consider an extract from his *Confessions*, in which he describes the role of virtuous women in his own conversion experience: how they served as exemplars; how they elicited the emotion of shame; how his emotional response eventually led to imitation.

Our extract is taken from book 8, chapter 11 of the *Confessions*, immediately before Augustine's account of his conversion experience in the garden in Milan.⁸⁰³ Here he describes a vision in which Lady Continence appears to him and displays before him an array of her spiritual children: celibate men and women, boys and girls. He says:

The taunts had begun to sound much less persuasive, however; for a revelation was coming to me from that country toward which I was facing, but into which I trembled to cross. There I beheld the chaste, dignified figure of Continence. Calm and cheerful was her manner, though modest, pure and honourable her charm as she coaxed me to come and hesitate no longer, stretching kindly hands to welcome and embrace me, hands filled with a wealth of heartening examples. A multitude of boys and girls were there, a great concourse of youth and persons of every age, venerable widows and women grown old in their virginity (*pueri et puellae; ibi iuventus multa et omnis aetas, et graves viduae, et virgines anus*), and in all of them I saw that this same Continence was by no means sterile, but the fruitful mother of children conceived in joy from you, her Bridegroom.⁸⁰⁴

⁸⁰² To a certain degree, the same can be said for the women in Augustine's congregations. This will be discussed further below.

⁸⁰³ *conf.* 8.11,27 (WSA I/1: 205). The conversion experience takes place in the next chapter: 8.12,29-30 (WSA I/1: 206-07).

⁸⁰⁴ *conf.* 8.11,27 (WSA I/1: 205; PL 32: 0761).

Whether these words describe a real vision that actually took place, or if they are simply a literary construct created for rhetorical effect, the image is striking. We note that Augustine draws attention to the diversity of the examples of celibacy: young and old, men, women, and children. In doing this, he draws our attention to the fact that, as Lady Continence holds out her arms, her hands are full of examples of the most weak human beings: the very young and the elderly, girls, widows, and old women.

Augustine realises that Lady Continence is a mother of many children, but he is not yet one of them. He, a man, is not strong enough to accept the chastity that is embraced by weak women and children. He continues:

She was smiling at me, but with a challenging smile, as though to say, ‘Can you not do what these men have done, these women (*tu non poteris quod isti, quod istae*)? Could any of them achieve it by their own strength, without the Lord their God? He it was, the Lord their God, who granted me to them. Why try to stand by yourself, only to lose your footing? Cast yourself on him and do not be afraid: he will not step back and let you fall. Cast yourself upon him trustfully; he will support and heal you’. And I was bitterly ashamed (*erubesceram*), because I could still hear the murmurs of those frivolities, and I was still in suspense, still hanging back.⁸⁰⁵

Augustine reads his own embarrassment and shame into the scene, as the challenging smile of Lady Continence seems to speak to him: even elderly women and young girls have adopted a life of celibacy; are you too weak to imitate their example? She effectively questions his masculinity, asking him: are you less of a man than these women? She provokes him to compare himself to the women and children, and to acknowledge his own deficiencies. The telling smile of Lady Continence kindly mocks him as she asks: ‘Can you not do what these men do, what these *women* do?’. She teases an emotional response from him as she makes him compare and contrast the physical weakness of the exemplars and his own spiritual weakness. Of course, her ultimate intention is not to make Augustine feel guilty, and the real message is not about gender. Rather, the reference to womanly weakness, and the emotions that it evokes, serves to coax and spur him on to engage with the deeper theological resonances, provoking him towards a close self-inspection, and motivating him to take action. Indeed, as he continues to look at the smile on her face, and the examples in her hands, Augustine begins to realise that such weak human beings

⁸⁰⁵ *ibid.*

would not have been able to accept celibacy by their own strength, but they must have relied on the strength of God.⁸⁰⁶ The images of the exemplars help to push him over that final barrier that prevented him from embracing Christianity in its entirety. They illustrate and confirm that which he already knew, but was reluctant to accept.

The vision of Lady Continence draws our attention to a key feature in Augustine's depictions of female martyrs for the men in his congregations. Standing in front of large audiences as the Bishop of Hippo, Augustine assumes the role of Lady Continence, as he presents the men in his audience with depictions of weak women martyrs. This time it is Augustine who holds the examples in his hands. Perhaps wearing a challenging smile, he prompts his male listeners to compare themselves to the weak women, encourages them to realise their own weaknesses and failings, provokes them to feel the same emotions of guilt and shame, coaxes them to draw out the same theological messages, and urges them to reconsider their actions and change their lifestyles by imitating the martyrs.

We can see this happening in a sermon delivered at a festival of the Twenty Martyrs (c. 408). Here Augustine draws attention to the women among the group of martyrs: Valeriana and Victoria. He opens the sermon with his usual exhortation to imitate the martyrs, who 'rejoice together with us, not if we honour them, but if we imitate them'.⁸⁰⁷ Then he moves on to develop what we might think of as a "hierarchy of imitation". He explains that, if human frailty (*humana fragilitas*) prevents us from imitating God, we should imitate Christ, who assumed human flesh in order that 'we might follow in his footsteps'.⁸⁰⁸ If then we think that we are too weak to imitate Christ, because he was not only a man but also the divine Word, then we should imitate the martyrs. In fact, this is the very reason why God gave us the martyrs: 'it was to deny our weakness and our lack of faith all such excuses that the martyrs built for us a paved road'.⁸⁰⁹ Augustine explains this hierarchy of imitation:

⁸⁰⁶ See also *conf.* 6.11,20 (WSA I/1: 152): 'I thought I would be exceedingly miserable if deprived of a woman's embrace, and gave no thought to the medicine prepared by your mercy for the healing of this infirmity, since I had no experience of it and believed that continence must be achieved by one's own strength, a strength of which I was not conscious in my own case. I was too stupid to realise that, as scripture testifies, no one can be continent except by your gift'.

⁸⁰⁷ *s.* 325.1 (WSA III/9: 167).

⁸⁰⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁰⁹ *ibid.* (168).

Who would ever be ashamed to say, “I am not God’s equal?” Obviously you are not. “I am not Christ’s equal”? Not even the mortal Christ’s. Peter was just what you are, Paul was just what you are, the apostles and the prophets were all just what you are. If you are reluctant to imitate the Lord, imitate your fellow servant.⁸¹⁰

Here we find that Christians are offered different models to imitate: God; Christ; the prophets, apostles, and martyrs.⁸¹¹ Augustine’s scheme of exemplarity and imitation accepts human weakness. The prophets, apostles, and martyrs are accessible role models because, as human beings, they are equal to all other Christians. But, still, some people complain that they are not equal to the apostles or the martyrs: that even these exemplars are beyond our imitation. In response to these people, Augustine appeals to the female martyrs:

Finally he is saying, “I am not Peter’s equal, I am not Paul’s equal”. Are you not the equal of truth? Country bumpkins are crowned, city slickers have no excuse. Finally, are you not the equal of boys, are you not the equal of girls? Are you not the equal of Saint Valeriana? If you are still reluctant to follow, do you not want to accompany Victoria?⁸¹²

While earlier in the sermon Augustine presented Peter and Paul as imitable examples by drawing attention to *equality* (the apostles are ‘just what you are’),⁸¹³ here we find him presenting his listeners with exemplars that are *unequal* to themselves: exemplars that would be considered to be inferior to, or weaker than, themselves. Augustine begins by appealing to inequalities of social class: a sophisticated man from Carthage has no excuse when the uneducated Punic-speaking farmer has been crowned as a martyr. But the clinching argument is found in the inequalities of the sexes. This final position in the list gives the female martyrs an emphatic quality that exaggerates their weakness and makes the message more powerful. Valeriana and Victoria are at the bottom of the hierarchy of imitation. They are presented as examples of the weakest human beings; the one group that no Christian can claim to be inferior to; the most imitable and accessible exemplars. Augustine asks the men in his audience: surely you are not inferior to women and girls?

⁸¹⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹¹ As we have seen, Augustine included Peter and Paul among the martyrs, and this meaning is intended in the context of this sermon.

⁸¹² *s.* 325.1 (WSA III/9: 168).

⁸¹³ *ibid.* (PL 38: 1448): *Petrus hoc erat quod tu, Petrus hoc erat quod tu.*

In this discussion of exemplarity, imitation, and (in)equality, we are reminded of the words of Aristotle: ‘if a thing is possible for those who are inferior, or weaker, or less intelligent, it will be still more so for those whose qualities are the opposite’.⁸¹⁴ By appealing to the achievements of the female martyrs, Augustine echoes the smile of Lady Continence. He forces the men in his audience to question their manly pride: how can you not imitate women when you are the stronger sex? Are you, a strong man, weaker than the weaker sex? Hitting hard at their sense of manliness, and daring them to live up to their supposed virility, Augustine removes the excuses of men who use human frailty as a defence for immorality.

Another example of this is found in a sermon delivered at the festival of the White Mass.⁸¹⁵ Here Augustine develops similar themes to those in our previous example, but with a more direct address to the men in his audience. Again he employs the theme of imitation as following in the footsteps of the martyrs. He explains that nobody should be reluctant or afraid of the journey ahead of them, because the example of the martyrs has shown that it is possible:

Why are you afraid of the hard ways of suffering and tribulation? He [Christ] travelled them himself.

You reply, no doubt, “But that was himself”.

The apostles travelled them.

You still reply, “But that was the apostles”.

I accept that. Answer this one; later on many men travelled those ways. Blush for shame: even women have travelled them (*transierunt et feminae*). Have you come as an old man to the point of martyrdom? Do not be afraid of death, if only because you are in its neighbourhood already. Are you a young man? Young men too travelled that way, who still had the hopes of life before them; even boys passed along it, even girls passed along it. How can the way be rough, when it has been smoothed by the feet of so many walking along it?⁸¹⁶

As with our previous example, Augustine presents his listeners with a hierarchy of exemplars: Christ; the apostles; elderly male martyrs; young male martyrs; women; boys; girls. If we are too weak to imitate the exemplar at the top of the list, we should try to imitate the next in line. But here we find a direct address to his male

⁸¹⁴ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 2.19.1392b (LCL 193: 269).

⁸¹⁵ *s.* 306.10 (WSA III/9: 23-24).

⁸¹⁶ *s.* 306.10 (WSA III/9: 23-24; PL 38: 1405).

listeners, as he orders them to blush (*erubescere!*), that is, to give the physical indication of the feeling of shame. Augustine forces all the men in his audience to ask themselves whether *they* are the imaginary interlocutor who complains that he is too weak to imitate women. If so, then they should be ashamed that they are afraid to follow weak women and young girls along the smooth path. Here Augustine leaves the men in his audience in no doubt of how they are to respond to the female martyrs.

The clearest example of Augustine's attempt to stir up feelings of shame among the men in his audience is found in a sermon delivered at the festival of the women martyrs of Thuburbo: Maxima, Donatilla, and Secunda.⁸¹⁷ Here he responds to those men who complain that it is too difficult to obey Christ's instruction, *Follow me* (Mk. 10:21):

Why are you holding back? There you are; the way has been shown to you.

"But the way is hard", you say; "who could ever follow him along that way?"

Blush for shame, bearded man, blush for shame; you are called a man from manliness. Women have followed him, those whose birthday we are celebrating today. We are celebrating the feast today of the women of Thuburbo. Your Lord, our Lord, their Lord, the redeemer of our lives, by going first has made of a rough and narrow way a paved road for you, a king's highway, safe and well protected, along which even women were delighted to walk; and are you still holding back? Are you unwilling to shed your blood in return for such blood as that? This is what your Lord is saying to you: "I first suffered for you; give back what you have received, give back what you have drunk". Are you, only you, unable to do that? Boys and girls have been able to; delicate, frail men and frail women have been able to; rich and outstandingly rich people have been able to... With all these examples before you, are you still sluggishly holding back?⁸¹⁸

Augustine addresses his imaginary interlocutor as a 'bearded man' (*barbate*), thus drawing on classical ideas of the beard as being a distinctive sign of a man's strength and authority. He explains that the word *vir* is derived from the word for strength *virtus* (*a virtute vir diceris*),⁸¹⁹ but the man who makes excuses should blush for shame (*erubescere, barabare, erubescere*), because he is too weak to walk the path that

⁸¹⁷ s. 345.6 (WSA III/10: 64).

⁸¹⁸ s. 345.6 (WSA III/10: 64; PL 39: 1521-22; PL 46: 0979).

⁸¹⁹ Where Augustine exclaims 'you are called a man from manliness', he is echoing the words of Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, 2.18.43 (LCL 141: 195-97): 'We must exercise [scorn of death and pain] if we wish to prove possession of virtue, or rather, since the word for 'virtue' is borrowed from the word for 'man', if we wish to be men'.

even the weakest Christians have walked: young girls and boys (*pueri et puellae*), elderly men and women (*delicati et delicatae*), rich people softened by luxuriant lifestyles (*divites et magni divites*). But, most of all, the bearded man is not prepared to tread the paths that even women like Maxima, Donatilla, and Secunda have delighted in walking. Reading between the lines, or listening to the silences between the words, we find that Augustine relies on the gender assumptions that would have been present in the minds of his listeners: *vir* comes from *virtus* (we read: just as *mulier* comes from *mollis*); the bearded man is strong and courageous (we read: but the woman is weak and fragile). And yet, the enthusiasm of the female martyrs and the reluctance of men to imitate Christ reverse these concepts as men and women switch places on the scale of morality: women become strong while men become weak; women become courageous while men become cowardly; women become active while men become passive. Augustine does not go so far as to say that these women “become male”, as many other Church Fathers do, but rather that his “bearded men” are acting in a more womanly fashion than their fellow female Christians. As a result, the exemplary female martyrs function to stamp out feeble excuses, and challenge men towards action, by engaging the emotion of shame.

These three extracts, in which Augustine uses female martyrs to shame the men in his audiences, remind us of a passage in one of his *Commentaries on the Psalms*, where he speaks about the daily battles that face the Christian individual, and explains that we should be inspired by the examples of virtuous Christians, and, in particular, women:

Suppose, for instance, you hear God beginning to say to you, “If you are not strong enough to do this, how can that other person do it? Or how was So-and-So able to manage it? You are hardly more delicate than that senator, are you? Are you weaker in health than this man or that man? Are you weaker even than women? If women have been strong enough to follow this way of life, is it too much for men?”⁸²⁰

These words, placed into God’s mouth, echo the smile of Lady Continence, and mirror the message of the female martyrs. By emphasising womanly weakness, Augustine uses provocative examples of spiritually strong women to probe the moral

⁸²⁰ *en. Ps.* 119.5 (WSA III/19: 503; PL 37: 1601): *numquid tu infirmior es feminis? Feminae potuerunt, viri non possunt?*

fibre of Christian men: he hits a nerve that impels them to action; he lights a spark of compunction that burns in their hearts.

And so, we have found that Augustine employs popular rhetorical techniques for pastoral purposes: the female martyrs are used as vehicles for the rhetorical aim *movere* or *flectere*; the depictions appeal to the emotions (*pathē*) to move listeners to reconsider their lives and actions; emotional engagement forces the listeners to take a personal interest in, and have a personal response to, the depictions. But why did Augustine use depictions of female martyrs to elicit the negative emotion of shame? To answer this we must consider not only his personal experience of the emotion (his response to the vision of Lady Continence), but also the rhetorical background for appeals to shame. For this, we must turn to Aristotle, who provides a definition of shame in his *Rhetoric*: 'Let shame then be defined as a kind of pain or uneasiness in respect of misdeeds, past, present, or future, which seem to tend to bring dishonour; and shamelessness as contempt and indifference in regard to these same things'.⁸²¹ Shame is, therefore, an emotion that arises when we consider our words and actions as if through the eyes of another person, and find that they arouse feelings of dishonour and disgrace. Shame disturbs the individual, causing them pain, and creating a certain discomfort that moves them from contempt or indifference to personal interest and involvement. It was precisely this transformative power that gave shame such protreptic power in rhetorical and educational settings, as we can see reflected in the writings of Cicero:

It must be noticed how much more energetically people fly from what is evil than they pursue what is good. Neither indeed do they seek after what is honourable so much as they try to avoid what is disgraceful. Who would seek to gain honour and glory and praise and any distinction so keenly as he flees from ignominy and discredit and contumely and disgrace?⁸²²

From this observation, Cicero draws a lesson that is equally applicable to the orator, the teacher, and the preacher:

Consequently, in exhorting and advising, although our aim will be to teach by what method it is possible for us to attain the good and avoid the evil, nevertheless in addressing well educated people we shall speak most of glory and honour... whereas if we are speaking in the presence of the unlearned

⁸²¹ Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 2.6.1383b (LCL 193: 211).

⁸²² Cicero, *Divisions of Oratory*, 26.91-92 (LCL 349: 379).

and ignorant, it is profits and rewards, pleasures and modes of avoiding pain that must be put forward; and references to contumely and disgrace must also be added, for there is nobody so boorish that he is not deeply sensitive to contumely and disgrace, even though he be less influenced by actual considerations of honour.⁸²³

In the context of classical rhetoric, the deliberate appeal to shame plays on the conscience of the listener, provoking them towards self-inspection, and prompting them to question their moral integrity.⁸²⁴ Seen in this context, Augustine's appeal to the emotion of shame can be understood as a direct attempt to disturb and disorient the indifferent and complacent, only then to redirect their hearts and minds towards right action, that is, imitation. Shame might not have been the most positive emotion that Augustine could have evoked with his depictions of female martyrs, but, as a stimulus for change, it was a powerful and effective remedy for apathy. By appealing to shame, Augustine used depictions of female martyrs to push his male listeners to realise that they are not estranged and disaffected spectators who observe the female martyrs from a distance, but rather they are all standing on the same stage; they are all engaging in the same battles; they are all part of the same grand narrative; they are all part of one body following Christ, their head. Consequently, while Augustine does not explain *how* men might imitate the women martyrs, his depictions of female martyrs address the more immediate and pressing matter of making men realise that they must *want* and *try* to imitate them.

Examples for Women

While Augustine tried to ensure that shame would be the predominant emotion that men experienced in response to the female martyrs, he tried to evoke a broader range of emotions and responses from the women in his audience: not only shame and guilt, but also empathy, confidence, courage, and emulation. However, while this list includes more positive emotions than that of shame alone, Augustine's message to the women in his audience was not always palatable. He did not only aim to encourage his female listeners, but also to reproach them; not only to praise them, but also to curb their pride; not only to exhort them, but also to dissuade them. As we will see, even though Augustine's methods for engaging the emotions varied for men and women, his

⁸²³ *ibid.* 26.92 (379).

⁸²⁴ For comments on the rhetoric of shame, more generally in the context of early Christianity, see further E. Clark (1992).

ultimate aim was the same for both his male and female listeners: to put his audience in the right frame of mind, stir their emotions, push them towards self-inspection, and move them to right belief and action.

As we turn to explore how Augustine presents female martyrs as exemplars for women to imitate, we might expect to find clear instructions on how women should imitate female martyrs. We might anticipate a sexually-consonant scheme of exemplarity similar to that which we encountered in his depictions of biblical women: just as Susanna is a model for married women and Mary is a model for virgins, so we might expect to find a similar presentation of mother-martyrs and virgin-martyrs.⁸²⁵ But the reality is not so simple. First, we remember Peter Brown's observation that Augustine does not usually present particular groups of martyrs as exemplars for imitation amongst particular groups of people. While there are some exceptions to this rule, we should not expect to find specific advice on how women might imitate the female martyrs. Second, it is difficult to determine when Augustine is presenting female martyrs as exemplars for the exclusive attention of the women in his audience. As with all his sermons, most often women are not addressed directly, and the imaginary interlocutor is generally assumed to be male. Third, the female martyrs are not easy exemplars for times of peace. Like jigsaw pieces forced into the wrong places in a puzzle, the female martyrs do not sit comfortably in their new surroundings. This is not to say that the female martyrs were not imitable exemplars for the women in Augustine's audiences, but rather that their pastoral potential was not immediately apparent. Their words and actions had to be translated, interpreted, and explained. Yet, despite the fact that Augustine does not provide explicit details on exactly how women should imitate female martyrs, we do find some clues that suggest how he intended them to respond to the female martyrs. In this section we will explore how Augustine tried to shape the way that his female listeners would receive and respond to his depictions of women martyrs.

Because of the link between exemplarity, imitation, and emotional engagement that has been set out in this chapter, we will focus on Augustine's use of the female martyrs to elicit emotional responses from the women in his audience.⁸²⁶

⁸²⁵ See Chapter Three, above.

⁸²⁶ Here we use the word "emotions" broadly, to refer not only to Aristotle's twelve *pathē*, but also other affections, dispositions, and responses.

This is not an easy task. While he arouses the emotions of his male listeners explicitly (*erubescere, barbare, erubescere*), his appeal to the emotions of his female listeners is more subtle. We have to read between the lines and search for clues that are concealed and obscured but, nevertheless, still present. As a result, we can anticipate that some of our findings will be speculative and conjectural rather than definitive and conclusive. But it is hoped that the examples drawn from Augustine's sermons and writings will both illustrate and lend weight to the overall picture.

We begin with an emotion that should be familiar to us by now: shame. As we have seen, when Augustine addressed the men in his audience, he aroused the emotion of shame in two ways: by encouraging comparison and by highlighting difference. Augustine's male listeners are made to compare themselves to the female martyrs and to find that they are different to the martyrs: the men are physically strong while the female martyrs were weak; the men are morally weak while the female martyrs were spiritually strong. Augustine's message to the women in his audience also relies on comparison, but on similarity as well as difference. The women in Augustine's audience are to realise that they are both *similar* to the female martyrs (they share the same womanly weakness and physical inferiority), and *different* to the female martyrs (they have been unable to achieve what the martyrs achieved). The emotion of shame is aroused when the women realise that they are at once close to, and distanced from, the exemplary figures. They are made sensitive to the distinction between potentiality and reality: that which they could be, but are not.

The appeal to shame would have been particularly pertinent to those women in Augustine's audience who denied their moral responsibility by hiding behind excuses of womanly weakness. The evocation of shame would have removed those excuses by showing that, if female martyrs can achieve the pinnacle of virtue, then no woman can appeal to her weak nature as an excuse for not making moral progress. This is a subtle message, but we find an illustration of it in Augustine's presentation of female martyrs as recapitulations of Eve. Here he presents the female martyrs as being like Eve with regard to sex, but distanced from her with regard to faith and moral action. The female martyrs did not hide behind excuses of womanly weakness, or appeal to the inherited negative example of Eve, to avoid suffering and death. We see this message in a sermon delivered at the festival of the martyr

Lawrence. Here Augustine draws attention to the presence of women among the martyrs, as he says:

It is not always the time for suffering death, but it is always the time for devoting one's life to God. Nor should any of us think we are too weak, where God is actively empowering us... Old men have been crowned, young men crowned, teenagers have been crowned, boys crowned, men have been crowned, women crowned. And among the women every age has been crowned.⁸²⁷

Augustine continues by comparing the female martyrs with Eve, only then to draw attention to their differences:

Nor did the female sex say, "I am unequal, because of my sex, to subduing the devil". It concentrated rather on overthrowing the enemy by whom it had been overthrown, and outfighting by faith the one by whom it had allowed itself to be seduced.⁸²⁸

The female martyr's recapitulation of Eve teaches a number of lessons: womanly weakness is not an excuse for moral laxity; virtue is attained by men and women equally; femininity is even more of a reason to engage in battle with the devil. Reading between the lines, we sense an almost reproachful tone which suggests that women in Augustine's audience *were* using gender as an excuse for their sins. Assuming that this is the case, his reference to the female martyrs pushes his female listeners to compare themselves with the two alternative figureheads – Eve and the female martyr – and to ask themselves who they resemble most closely.⁸²⁹ Those women who use womanly weakness as an excuse are prompted to feel ashamed in front of the female martyrs, to realise that they are perpetuating the legacy of Eve, and to be moved to reconsider their choice of exemplars for imitation in daily life. By eliciting shame, Augustine pushes the women in his audience to realise that their actions are not predetermined by the characteristics of their sex. The female martyrs prove that women can – and, therefore, should – take full responsibility for their perseverance and moral progress. The example of the female martyrs is persuasive

⁸²⁷ s. 305A.2 (WSA III/8: 325).

⁸²⁸ *ibid.*

⁸²⁹ For Augustine, excuses are an important of the Fall. See, for example, s. 224.2 (WSA III/6: 243): 'Did it do her any good, I ask you, that the woman said, *The serpent seduced me* (Gn. 3:13)? Did the excuse carry any weight? If the excuse carried weight, why did the condemnation follow?'

proof of the ability of women to overcome the devil. If the female martyrs fought with the devil, what excuses do women have today?

Augustine's evocation of guilt and shame prompts his female listeners towards repentance by making them realise that Christians must not excuse themselves from sin, but accuse themselves by confessing their sins to God. But his depictions of female martyrs also deliver a message of consolation that inspires confidence and hope among the women in his audience. By presenting the female martyrs as recapitulations of Eve, Augustine preaches a lesson that is positive and encouraging: martyrdom – whether literal or spiritual – is a way for women to distance themselves from Eve by breaking free from the cycle of credulity, deception, and excuse that has plagued women throughout history.

An example of this is found in Augustine's depictions of Perpetua and Felicitas. When speaking of Perpetua's vision in which she stood on the snake's head before ascending the golden ladder, he presents Perpetua as a second Eve:

So the dragon was trampled on by the blessed Perpetua's chaste foot and victorious tread, when the ladder by which she would go to God was set up and revealed. Thus the head of the ancient serpent, which had been the ruin of woman as she fell, was made into a step for woman as she ascended.⁸³⁰

Here Augustine encourages his female listeners to realise that, while all women are associated with Eve by virtue of their femininity, they do not have to identify with her. The female martyrs are alternative role models, who not only recapitulate Eve by their faith, hope, and love, but they also win a better crown on account of their additional battle against womanly weakness: 'A more splendid crown, I mean, is owed to those of the weaker sex, because a manly spirit has clearly done much more in women, when the feminine frailty has not been undone under such enormous pressure'.⁸³¹ The very femininity which links the female martyrs to Eve becomes a source of additional praise for their victory over the devil: 'It was a greater miracle for women in their weakness to overcome the ancient enemy'.⁸³² Here Augustine does not only remove the excuses of the women in his audience, but he even reverses

⁸³⁰ s. 280.1 (WSA III/8: 72).

⁸³¹ s. 281.1 (WSA III/8: 78).

⁸³² s. 282.3 (WSA III/8: 82).

them; womanly weakness is not an excuse for immorality, but it is both the motivation and the source of praise for all virtuous women.

Another positive response that Augustine evokes with his depictions of female martyrs is that of courage. An example of this is found in his depiction of the virgin martyr, Agnes. In a sermon delivered at the joint festival of Agnes and Fructuosus and his companions, Augustine compares the Christian martyrs with the pagan gods. Immediately after introducing the female martyr, he considers the comparison:

Blessed are those whose passion has been related; blessed too is Saint Agnes, who also suffered on this same day; a virgin who was that which she was called. Agnes means “lamb” in Latin, “chaste” in Greek. She was that which she was called; she was deservedly rewarded with a martyr’s crown. So then what, my brothers and sisters, what am I to say to you about those men whom the pagans have worshipped as gods...? What am I to say to you? That they are not to be compared to our martyrs? Even that is an insult, that I should so much as say it.⁸³³

Augustine continues to explain that there is no comparison between the Christian martyrs and the pagan gods:

What is Juno worth, as against one little old faithful Christian woman? As against one weak old Christian man, trembling in all his limbs, what is Hercules worth? Yes, he overcame Cacus, Hercules the lion, Hercules overcame the hound Cerberus; Fructuosus overcame the whole world. Compare a man with a man. Agnes, a thirteen-year-old girl, overcame the devil. This girl defeated the one who deceived so many about Hercules.⁸³⁴

We might be surprised that a man surpasses a man: that the martyr Fructuosus surpasses the heroic Hercules. But we should be even more astonished that a delicate little girl did not just surpass the pagan goddess Juno, nor did she only outshine the heroic Hercules, but she even conquered the devil.⁸³⁵ The image of Agnes illustrates how the weak can defeat the strong. This depiction carries a pastoral message that would have had a special resonance for the young girls and female virgins in Augustine’s audience: even the smallest, most delicate little girl can outshine the

⁸³³ s. 273.6 (WSA III/8: 19-20).

⁸³⁴ *ibid.* (20).

⁸³⁵ Cf. Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 37.4-5 (LCL 250: 429): ‘How many of our number have, without a moan, allowed not their right hand only, but their whole body to be burned to ashes, when it was within their power to win release! Am I comparing men (*viri*) only with Mucius or Aquilius, or Regulus? Nay, our boys and tender women are so inspired to sufferance of pain that they laugh to scorn crosses and tortures, wild beasts and all the paraphernalia of punishment’.

strongest pagan heroes and defeat the devil. When seen on a more mundane level, the example of Agnes illustrates that no trial is too difficult for the virtuous Christian, no matter how young or weak they are. Although Augustine does not draw out this moral lesson explicitly, the pastoral potential of his words could not have been lost on him. The powerful image of the little girl defeating the devil was surely intended to arouse courage among the women in his audience.

Remaining with our focus on the female virgins in Augustine's audience, we find that he used depictions of female martyrs to inform the attitudes, beliefs, and lives of both virgins and wives. In the context of the lively debate on the relative goods of virginity and marriage, Augustine appeals to the example of the female martyrs to endorse his vision of the Church as a 'garden of the Lord', which includes 'not only the roses of martyrs, but also the lilies of virgins, and the ivy of married people, and the violets of widows'.⁸³⁶ He did this by using the depictions of female martyrs in two interrelated ways: to chastise proud virgins who considered themselves to be better than married women; to reassure married women of the good of marriage, and to help them to realise that 'there is absolutely no kind of human beings, dearly beloved, who need despair of their vocation; Christ suffered for all'.⁸³⁷ That is, on the one hand he seeks to remove the pride of virgins by moving them to humility, and, on the other hand, he seeks to relieve the despair of married women by affirming the value and purpose of their chosen lifestyle. We can see this reflected in his depictions of female martyrs, which include wives and mothers (Crispina, Perpetua, Felicitas, the Maccabean Mother) as well as virgins (Agnes, the female Martyrs of Thuburbo). But, in the context of his discussions on marriage and virginity, Augustine uses the female martyrs more explicitly to reproach the proud and encourage the dejected.

In a large section of his treatise *On Holy Virginity* (*De sancta virginitate*) (31,31-52,53), Augustine focuses on the seriousness of the sin of pride that arises among virgins who compare themselves with married women and conclude that they are superior in their commitment to the faith.⁸³⁸ Pride, he says, is the most serious of sins, as it goes against the example set by Christ's crucifixion, and it breeds envy,

⁸³⁶ s. 304.2 (WSA III/8: 317).

⁸³⁷ *ibid.*

⁸³⁸ *virg.* 31,31 (WSA I/9: 87).

which is the enemy of love.⁸³⁹ He then sets out his intentions for writing: ‘to see that all precautions are taken to ward off pride’.⁸⁴⁰ It is particularly important that virgins avoid the sin of pride: ‘since perpetual chastity, and especially virginity, is a great gift for God’s saints, great vigilance is needed to save it from being corrupted by pride’.⁸⁴¹ He describes proud virgins as being afflicted with ‘the cancer of self-satisfaction’.⁸⁴²

Augustine explains that, while the virgin must not hesitate to rank virginity above marriage, she must not rank the individual virgin above the individual married woman.⁸⁴³ He urges virgins to turn away from an external comparison of physical virtues, and towards an inner, spiritual comparison. According to such spiritual comparisons, the virgin must realise that she may have hidden defects that make her inferior to the married woman:

how does the virgin know whether perhaps, because of some hidden spiritual defect, she is not yet ready for martyrdom, whereas the other woman, whom she delights to think is her inferior, is already able to drink the cup of the Lord’s humility, the cup he offered to be drunk first to the disciples who were eager to have the places of honour?⁸⁴⁴

He continues:

What I am saying is this: How can she know whether she is perhaps not yet a Thecla, but the other woman is a Crispina?⁸⁴⁵

Here we find that, once again, Augustine appeals to comparison. The virgin is not to compare herself to married women, but to female martyrs. While virginity is greater than marriage, martyrdom is greater than virginity. There is no way of knowing whether a particular married woman is capable of martyrdom while a particular virgin is not, because ‘martyrdom is a gift that remains hidden if it is not put to the

⁸³⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁸⁴¹ *ibid.* 33,33 (89).

⁸⁴² *ibid.* 34,34 (90).

⁸⁴³ *ibid.* 44,45 (98).

⁸⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁴⁵ *ibid.*

test'.⁸⁴⁶ On this basis, virgins are warned against self-satisfaction and feelings of superiority:

she should hold virginity to be a much greater and better thing than marriage, while still being conscious that she does not know whether any particular married woman is already capable of suffering for Christ, whereas she is not yet capable of that and it is a mercy to her that her weakness is not put to the test.⁸⁴⁷

Augustine makes the comparison internal. The outward comparison of virginity and marriage only measures the virtues that we can see; those virgins who appear to be more virtuous might have spiritual defects, while those wives who appear to be less virtuous might have more significant spiritual gifts.⁸⁴⁸ He develops this further with the example of married martyrs:

Perhaps those men and women, therefore, who live a married life admirable in its own way, are already capable of resisting the enemy's efforts to force them to commit acts of wickedness, even with their bodies torn apart and their blood poured out. And perhaps those men and women who have kept themselves chaste since childhood and *have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of God* (Mt. 19:12) still do not have the strength to endure anything like that for justice, or for purity itself.⁸⁴⁹

Here Augustine's message is similar to that mentioned in his partner treatise, *On the Good of Marriage* (*De bono conjugali*). As with his treatise on virginity, in this treatise on marriage he explains that it is not possible to judge morality on external appearances alone. 'Virtues of the mind', he says, 'sometimes manifest themselves in deeds, sometimes lie hidden as a habitual disposition'.⁸⁵⁰ Here again he appeals to the example of martyrdom:

The virtue of martyrdom shone and became visible when martyrdom was endured. Yet how many there are who possess the same virtue of mind, but miss out on the trial whereby what lies within them, seen by God, comes out also into human view. It is not that it comes into being then, but that is when it becomes known.⁸⁵¹

⁸⁴⁶ *ibid.* 46,46 (WSA I/9: 99).

⁸⁴⁷ *ibid.* 47,47 (WSA I/9: 100).

⁸⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁵⁰ *b. conjug.* 21,25 (WSA I/9: 51).

⁸⁵¹ *ibid.* (51-52).

He explains: 'virtue exists as a disposition, even when it does not exist in deeds'.⁸⁵² By shifting the focus away from an external comparison of actions and towards an internal comparison of virtue (which is, ultimately, only possible for God), Augustine's main intention was to temper the pride of self-satisfied virgins. But his message also had the potential to encourage and inspire the married women in his congregation. While proud virgins are reminded of their dissimilarity and distance from the female martyrs, married women are assured that they are not so distant or different to the female martyrs. In this way, married women are encouraged by the thought that they too might possess the hidden virtue of martyrdom. And so, Augustine's references to married women martyrs function both to shame the proud and strengthen the weak, while also affirming the variety of forms in which Christian virtue is experienced and made manifest.

A more particular example of exemplarity and imitation is found in Augustine's depiction of Perpetua as an obedient daughter. It is difficult to see how Perpetua might serve as a role model for the women in Augustine's congregation; she rejected her role as a mother by abandoning her baby, and she rejected her place in the household by disobeying her father. And yet, focusing on the latter point, Augustine interprets her actions to present her as a model of an obedient daughter. He describes the scene: the devil equipped Perpetua's father with cunning words to break her spirit and appeal to her familial duty, but Perpetua's response was one of perfect obedience: 'Saint Perpetua, however, answered her father with such moderation, that she neither violated the commandment by which honour is owed to parents, nor yielded to the tricks which the real enemy was practicing'.⁸⁵³ Perpetua did not listen to his words, but she did feel pain as she watched him being whipped. She did not consent to his pleas, but she did still love him. Augustine explains: 'What she hated in him was his folly, not his nature; his unbelief, not her roots'.⁸⁵⁴ This only added to her glory: 'she earned all the greater glory by resolutely rejecting the bad advice of such a beloved father'.⁸⁵⁵ This depiction of Perpetua has an apologetic tone. Augustine defends the female martyr's disregard of her father by

⁸⁵² *ibid.* 21,26 (52).

⁸⁵³ *s.* 281.2 (WSA III/8: 79).

⁸⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁸⁵⁵ *ibid.*

presenting her actions not as disobedience, but as obedience to God despite her love for her father. We might consider that this interpretation was intended to arouse feelings of family piety and obedience among Augustine's female listeners; that Perpetua's actions were, ironically, intended to affirm the authority of the *pater familias* and emphasise the love and obedience that daughters should show for their fathers.

But perhaps there is more going on here. If Augustine's own family is typical, then many of the Christian women in his congregations would have been wives or daughters of pagan men, just as Augustine's anonymous sister (a Christian) was the daughter of his father, Patricius (a pagan). If this is the case, then Perpetua becomes a more literal model of how Christian daughters should respond to their pagan fathers in the present day. Perpetua exemplifies the love that daughters must feel for their fathers *as fathers*, but she also exemplifies the disregard that daughters must have for the religious views of their fathers *as pagans*. Augustine's depiction of Perpetua is carefully balanced between love of her father and love of God: obedience to her father and obedience to God. But, of course, when forced to make the decision between the two, Perpetua chooses her heavenly father, yet she feels sympathy for the physical and emotional pain that this causes to her father. Perpetua's example does, therefore, bear a more literal and immediate example to be imitated by those women and girls who were daughters of pagan fathers.

Finally, another more literal example for imitation is found in Augustine's depiction of Crispina. We have already noted that his depiction of this female martyr is a highly creative image that adds details to the memory of the martyrs that are not found in the martyrdom narrative. One of these additions is the description of Crispina as a wealthy woman, from a famous and noble family, who was accustomed to the delicate lifestyle of the rich.⁸⁵⁶ This depiction of the female martyr does not seem to have any explanation except when seen in a pastoral context. Here Augustine's depiction of the wealthy Crispina can be understood as an example of the renunciation of worldly riches in favour of spiritual riches. Not only does she serve as an exemplar to be imitated by the wealthy men and women in Augustine's

⁸⁵⁶ *en. Ps.* 120.13 (WSA III/19: 524).

congregation, but she also preaches a message to reproach and correct those less wealthy members of his congregation who pray for worldly riches:

You are celebrating the birthday of a holy, blessed woman, and are you by any chance entertaining desires for earthly prosperity? Such was the strength of her holy desire that she gave up the prosperity she had enjoyed on earth... Must we conclude that she had no sense of what was worth longing for and what was best trampled underfoot? On the contrary, she knew how to sing psalms in the presence of God's angels and how to long for their friendship, for a holy, pure society where she would never die again, where she would meet a judge with whom no lie could prevail.⁸⁵⁷

Augustine's depiction of Crispina functions to transform the desires and hopes of his listeners from temporal, earthly riches to eternal, spiritual riches. Crispina sets an example that is just as pertinent for men as it is for women. She incites emulation and inspires the desire to attain similar spiritual wealth through imitation.

Our investigation of Augustine's presentation of female martyrs as exemplars for women is, of course, speculative. However, the examples and interpretations that we have explored do allow us to see how the depictions had great potential to arouse emotions and inspire change among the women in his congregations. Augustine's depictions of female martyrs are inspirational portraits that motivate, encourage, and enthuse, but also function to shame, reproach, and condemn. This range of emotions and responses reflects the diversity of the women in his congregations: their different experiences of the Christian faith, and the varying forms of piety that they adopted. Augustine's female martyrs speak directly to his female listeners as fellow wives, mothers, daughters, and virgins.

As is the general case with the study of Late Antiquity, it is most unfortunate that we do not have direct access to the voices of Christian women. It would be interesting to have an indication of how Augustine's female listeners received and responded to his depictions of female martyrs, whether they readily accepted the female martyrs as role models to shape their understanding of female piety, or whether they entirely rejected the beliefs, values, and actions that the female martyrs embodied. Nevertheless, it is clear that Augustine used the female martyrs to convey a range of different messages to shape the lives of diverse groups of women. Whether those women accepted or rejected his depictions of the martyrs, it is

⁸⁵⁷ *en. Ps.* 137.7 (WSA III/20: 246).

difficult to imagine that Augustine's female martyrs would have failed to excite, inspire, encourage, and transform the lives of the women in his congregations.

Excursus: Do not Imitate the Martyrs!

At the beginning of this chapter we saw that Augustine repeatedly and emphatically affirmed that the only way to honour a martyr is to imitate a martyr. However, there is one important exception to this rule. In the first book of his *City of God*, Augustine discusses one circumstance in which the martyrs must not be imitated: suicide.

For Augustine, suicide was never acceptable. The one and only exception is if a person were to receive a divine command to take their own life.⁸⁵⁸ This prohibition of suicide is in line with the general consensus of early Christian moral teachings. But, for Church Fathers such as Eusebius, Ambrose, Jerome, and Chrysostom, there was one other exception to the rule. They claimed that it would be acceptable for somebody to take their own life if they were threatened with sexual violence. So Jerome explains: 'It is not ours to lay hold of death; but we freely accept it when it is inflicted by others. Hence, even in persecutions it is not right for us to die by our own hands, except when chastity is threatened'.⁸⁵⁹ This exception was almost exclusively related to women, because, judging from the textual sources that are available to us, the threat of sexual violation was only part of the trial and torture of women.⁸⁶⁰ As a result, those female martyrs who committed suicide to preserve their virginity or marital chastity constitute a sub-category in the general group of female martyrs. In this sub-category we find the virgin martyr Pelagia, who threw herself off the roof of her house to avoid violation;⁸⁶¹ the married woman Domnina, who drowned her two young daughters before taking her own life to avoid

⁸⁵⁸ For the notion that self-killing is only acceptable when it is in response to a divine command, see Augustine's comments on Samson: *civ. Dei*, 1.27 (Dyson: 39). See Bauerschmidt, 'Suicide', art., in Fitzgerald (1999), 820.

⁸⁵⁹ Jerome, *Commentary on the Prophet Jonah*, 1.6, cited in Darrel W. Amundsen, 'Suicide and Early Christian Values', in Baruch A. Brody, *Suicide and Euthanasia: Historical and Contemporary Themes*, Philosophy and Medicine, vol. 35 (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989), 77-53, at 120.

⁸⁶⁰ See further G. Clark (1998), 106: '[rape] must in practice have been a danger for women martyrs and confessors who were imprisoned. It was also, presumably, a danger for men and especially for boys, but that danger was not openly acknowledged'.

⁸⁶¹ Chrysostom, *Homily on Pelagia* (Mayer: 148-57); Ambrose, *On Virgins*, 3.7.33-34 (Ramsey: 114-15).

sexual threats;⁸⁶² an anonymous married woman from Rome, who stabbed herself with a sword to prevent the violation of her chastity.⁸⁶³ In the texts and sermons that commemorate these female martyrs, the women are presented as exemplary figures, whose examples are intended to inspire awe, admiration, and, in the right (or wrong) circumstances, literal imitation.

These female martyrs draw on the pattern of noble death set by classical examples of female suicide, including Cleopatra, Dido, and Lucretia.⁸⁶⁴ Valuing honour over shame, and, consequently, death over life, the female martyrs embody similar virtues as their classical counterparts. But they also communicate the Christian faith and promote a message of the absolute virtue of chastity: a message that, we can assume, would have been particularly pertinent for those Christian women who lived ascetic lives of virginity or chaste marriage. The female martyrs offered a specifically Christian model of chastity and martyrdom.

But Augustine broke with both classical and Christian traditions.⁸⁶⁵ He rejected the exemplary value of the female martyrs who committed suicide, and he condemned imitation of their actions. This is seen in the first book of the *City of God*, where Augustine comments on ‘certain holy women’, who are most likely to be Domnina and her two daughters, Bernike and Prosdoke:

But, they say, in the time of persecution certain holy women, in order to escape those who might abuse their purity, hurled themselves into a river which bore them away and drowned them, and in that way died. Moreover, their martyrdom is celebrated with veneration by great numbers in the Catholic Church. Of these women I do not venture any casual judgement. For I do not know if the Divine Authority has, by some trustworthy testimonies, persuaded the Church so to honour their memories; and it may be that this is so. For what if they did this thing not because they were deceived by human frailty, but by divine command, and so were not in error, but

⁸⁶² Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 8.12 (FC 29: 185-86); Chrysostom, *A Homily on Saints Bernike, Prosdoke, and Domnina* (Mayer: 158-76); Ambrose, *On Virgins*, 3.7.34-36 (Ramsey: 115-16).

⁸⁶³ Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 8.14 (FC 29: 197-98). Rufinus refers to this woman as Sophronia.

⁸⁶⁴ G. W. Bowersock, *Martyrdom and Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 64. For pagan attitudes towards noble death, see Jan Willem van Henten and Friedrich Avemarie, *Martyrdom and Noble Death: Selected Texts from Graeco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian Antiquity* (London; New York: Routledge).

⁸⁶⁵ Although, it is important to note that Augustine’s prohibition was in line with Platonism, and especially Plotinus, who opposed suicide. See Bowersock (1995), 65-66.

obedient?... For when God gives a command and shows without any ambiguity that it is His command, who will call obedience a crime?⁸⁶⁶

On the one hand, Augustine reasons, the women took their own lives, and so they should not be considered as martyrs. But, on the other hand, it is possible that, when taking their own lives, they were obeying a command from God, in which case they should be considered as martyrs. Because it is not possible to be certain whether their actions were motivated by human error or divine command, he reserves judgement: 'we do not presume to judge those things which are hidden from us'.⁸⁶⁷ However, he does make it clear that, whether or not the women should be remembered as martyrs, their example must not be imitated: 'this we say; this we assert; this we in all ways approve: that nobody ought voluntarily to inflict death upon themselves, for this is to flee from temporal ills by falling into eternal ones'.⁸⁶⁸

Augustine's perception of female martyrs who took their own lives would have been coloured by his frequent condemnations of Donatist martyrs, in which he equates voluntary martyrdom and suicide.⁸⁶⁹ But, in this particular case, his concern is also related to the motivation for martyrdom: the women are said to have committed suicide to avoid sexual violation. The immediate significance of this becomes apparent when we consider that Augustine wrote the *City of God* soon after the Sack of Rome, during which many women, including consecrated virgins, were rumoured to have killed themselves to preserve their chastity.⁸⁷⁰ Considering this, we find that Augustine's reflections on these female martyrs are not simply academic or hypothetical, but they respond to real events that had taken place only very recently. In this context, the example of the female martyrs might be seen to justify, or even endorse and encourage, suicide amongst those women who are threatened with sexual violence. It is for this reason that Augustine makes it clear that innocence and purity reside in the soul. Physical violation does not taint chastity:

⁸⁶⁶ *civ. Dei*, 1.26 (Dyson: 38-39).

⁸⁶⁷ *ibid.* (39).

⁸⁶⁸ *ibid.* (39-40).

⁸⁶⁹ See above, Chapter One. For general comments on the fine line between voluntary martyrdom and suicide in early Christianity, see Bowersock (1995), 59-74.

⁸⁷⁰ *civ. Dei*, 1.16 (Dyson: 26). See further Dennis Trout, 'Re-Textualizing Lucretia: Cultural Subversion in the *City of God*', *J ECS*, 2 (1994), 53-70.

Let this be stated and affirmed: that the virtue by which life is lived rightly has its seat in the soul; that it directs the members of the body from there; that the body is made holy by the exercise of a holy will; and that, while this will remains unshaken and steadfast, nothing that another does with the body, or in the body, that the sufferer has no power to avert without sinning in turn, is the fault of the sufferer.⁸⁷¹

If physical violence does not destroy the purity of the soul, then women have no reason to feel shame or guilt:

A woman who has been overcome by violence and violated by the sin of another, therefore, has done nothing for which she ought to punish herself with voluntary death. Still less ought she to do so before the event; for let not the certain guilt of murder be incurred while an outrage which is not even her own yet remains uncertain.⁸⁷²

If no sin has been committed, then no guilt is incurred. Consequently, the woman has no reason to feel shame, or to allow that feeling of shame to provoke her to take her own life.

Although Augustine reserves judgement on the martyr status of the three women in question in the *City of God*, he is adamant that their example must not be imitated. Their actions are to be distanced from those of the true female martyrs, and more closely aligned with classical models of noble death, such as that of Lucretia. Like Lucretia, women who commit suicide to preserve their chastity are inspired by a misplaced sense of shame, and, provoked by that emotion to take their own lives, they perpetuate a disordered, pagan attitude towards life and death. These female martyrs are negative exemplars, who, alongside Eve, Lot's wife, and Job's wife, provide examples that must be remembered, not so that they might be honoured, admired, or imitated, but so that their actions might be avoided.

While Augustine explicitly rejects the exemplary value of women who take their own lives, he affirms that the true martyrs are those women who do not commit suicide, but those who choose to endure in the flesh, even to the point of captivity or physical violation. He expresses these views in his letter to Victorinus, which he wrote towards the end of 409. Rehearsing ideas that he would develop later in the *City of God*, he explains that Christians should not despair over the capture of chaste and holy women, because God does not abandon them:

⁸⁷¹ *civ. Dei*, 1.16 (Dyson: 26).

⁸⁷² *ibid.* 1.18 (28-29).

[God] will not permit their most chaste members to suffer anything from the lust of the enemy or, if he does permit this, when the mind is stained by no shameful consent, it also protects its flesh from sin. And whatever the carnal desire of the suffering women neither committed nor permitted in the flesh will be the sin only of the man who does this.⁸⁷³

He continues with an intriguing twist on the definition of female martyrdom: ‘And all that violence suffered [by the women] will not be regarded by God as a shameful loss of chastity, but as the wound of martyrdom’.⁸⁷⁴ The false martyr is the woman who dies by her own hand; the true martyr is the woman who perseveres in life despite the sins of others.

Conclusion: Depicting Martyrs, Transforming Christians

If we cast our minds back to the introduction to Part One of this study, we remember how Augustine refused Paulinus’s request to produce a written account of the passions of the martyrs. His explanation for his decision was that his own account would not produce the same intense emotions that he had experienced when he read accounts of the martyrs. We remember his words to Paulinus: ‘I am afraid that I would not induce a feeling similar to that which they produced in me when I read them’. For Augustine, the real value of the memory of the martyrs resides in the transformation that occurs as a result of hearing and responding to the stories of martyrdom. If that transformation does not occur, the stories of the martyrs are worth committing neither to memory nor to paper. Throughout this chapter we have seen this same judgement recurring, as Augustine insistently states that imitation is the one and only purpose of commemoration. While at first his exhortation to imitation might seem surprisingly vague, really what he was urging was a response. With all his depictions of female martyrs, Augustine tried to elicit that response by engaging the emotions of his audience to prompt them to take a personal interest in the martyrs. The very thing that he had enjoyed and found valuable when reading accounts of the martyrs – the feeling that they produced in him – is reflected in his construction and employment of the female martyrs. But, while in his letter to Paulinus, Augustine identifies this feeling primarily as delight (*delectaverant me*), his own depictions of female martyrs appeal to a much wider spectrum of emotions,

⁸⁷³ *ep.* 111.9 (WSA II/2: 93-94).

⁸⁷⁴ *ibid.* (94).

feelings, and responses, ranging from encouragement and inspiration to shame and humility. By exciting the emotions, Augustine's female martyrs effect an inner transformation that reorients individual hearts and minds towards God.

Conclusion

REFLECTING ON AUGUSTINE'S FEMALE MARTYRS

In the introduction to this thesis we observed that Augustine's depictions of female martyrs have been overlooked in studies of his attitudes towards women and his reflections on the cult of the martyrs. Throughout this study we have attempted to take one step towards addressing this oversight by resituating the female martyrs within the corpus of his works. But this thesis is not intended to be an arbitrary attempt to fill a gap in scholarship. Rather, it has arisen from a sincere anticipation that Augustine's female martyrs are meaningful depictions that can help us to paint a richer, fuller, and more vibrant picture of the bishop, his theological beliefs, and his pastoral ministry. Throughout this study we have sharpened and defined this initial impression by exploring the depth, complexity, and inter-connectedness of Augustine's depictions of female martyrs.

However, the resulting image that emerges from this study is far from concrete and complete. Augustine's female martyrs raise many questions in response to which we can offer only speculative possibilities rather than conclusive answers. This is because his depictions of female martyrs are partial, fragmentary, and incomplete. But, by now, we should know that we cannot expect much more than this from Augustine. All his depictions of the martyrs, both male and female, are ethereal, intangible, and almost enigmatic by their very nature. And yet, precisely because of this, we must acknowledge the importance of the information that is available to us. Even his brief and fleeting references to female martyrs are significant. While some female martyrs hold his attention for only a few short moments, even the briefest of allusions is a concise and condensed communication of moral and theological meaning. We might like to think of these brief allusions and passing comments as heavy little parcels of meaning; the packaging has not yet been unwrapped, the contents have not yet been unpacked, and the individual parts have not yet been assembled in their final form, but still those few words contain the same elements, and carry the same great weight, as his longer and more developed representations of female martyrs.

Augustine's depictions of female martyrs are not just products or illustrations of his theological reflection, but they are also cognitive tools that helped him to

contemplate, shape, and articulate theological ideas. The female martyrs are windows into his mind. They allow us to see what he was thinking, how he communicated those thoughts, and how he tried to encourage others to accept his way of thinking. For Augustine, the female martyrs were “good to think with”. They were soft and malleable, and could be pressed, shaped, and formed to create new images from the old. This process of kneading and sculpting was a kind of mental work-out that exercised his mind, and helped him to construct, order, and clarify his thoughts and beliefs. When we perceive his depictions of the female martyrs without paying attention to their author, they seem quite unremarkable. But, when we place Augustine inside the frame, and perceive the female martyrs as extensions of his mind and mirrors of his thought, we find that they are personal, reflective, and profound images.

As with his depictions of male martyrs, Augustine presented the female martyrs as witnesses to divine truths, catalysts for moral action, and personal helpers on the path to salvation. But, as women, Augustine's female martyrs embodied, illustrated, and conveyed ideas and beliefs more forcefully than their male counterparts. Their weak female bodies provided compelling proofs of the strengthening power of God's grace. Womanly weakness was also more convincing in a pastoral context, as it removed the excuses of the morally lax, consoled the despondent, and inspired women and girls towards moral action. Of course, similar theological messages could have been conveyed by male martyrs, and similar moral lessons could have been taught by young boy martyrs. But, for Augustine, the female martyrs were, ironically, the strongest and most powerful communicators. They were unquestionable proofs, unsurpassable witnesses, and universal exemplars.

Augustine increased the theological depth, pastoral potential, and affective power of the female martyrs by making femininity central to their memory. By exaggerating womanly weakness, he painted complex and powerful portraits in which salvation history is condensed, and the human condition is proclaimed. Their female bodies remind us of human weakness, but they also testify to Christ's *kenosis*, they preach the necessity and availability of grace, and they visibly reveal the inner working of the Holy Spirit. They show that all human beings need, and can receive, divine protection and defence. They testify to God's mercy, teach the right order of love, illustrate the ascent of the heart, and bear witness to the deeply personal and

loving action of God in the world. The full force of the marital, martial, mystical, and sacramental imagery that Augustine employs to describe the female martyrs relies upon the fact that the martyrs were women.

Throughout this thesis we have seen that Augustine's female martyrs are deep and meaningful depictions. However, whether his audiences were fully aware of this depth and complexity is quite another matter. At various points in this study we have stopped to consider how his readers and listeners might have received and responded to his depictions of female martyrs. But, often the closest that we can get to discovering this is to see how Augustine himself chose his words and themes carefully in an attempt to control his readers' and listeners' reception of the depictions. This draws our attention to a potential methodological problem: our synchronic approach to the sources leaves open the danger of over-analysing his depictions of female martyrs. There is a vast difference between the way that a fourth century North African Christian would have received Augustine's depictions of the martyrs, and the way that we receive them today. Aside from the plethora of factors that distance us from his original audiences, we do not receive Augustine's depictions of female martyrs aurally in sermons, but we receive them visually in text. His depictions of female martyrs are now preserved in tidy volumes of printed text that can be read, re-read, photocopied, highlighted, and compared side-by-side. Unlike his original audiences, we can encounter any depiction of any female martyr on any day of the year; we can take time to ponder over the transcribed words; we can reflect on difficult or complicated sentences; we can compare a sermon on Perpetua with a sermon on Crispina.

But, while we must be aware of this methodological problem, we should not conclude that all common patterns, similarities, or themes shared by different sources are anachronistic results of our over-analysis of the texts. In fact, while the transcribed words of Augustine's sermons give us more *time* to reflect on his depictions of female martyrs, his original audiences would have had more *opportunity* to be exposed to the depictions. Considering that he preached at annual martyr festivals, that the North African Church commemorated many different female martyrs, and that he preached for over thirty years, the number of his sermons on female martyrs that are available to us today is remarkably small. The present study is based on only that small fraction of extant sources. Yet, despite the small

number of sources, we have been able to see that all his depictions of female martyrs are linked together by a fine web of invisible threads: a common framework of interpretation. While now we see the female martyrs as individual pins on a board, Augustine's original audiences would have seen threads wound and knotted around those pins to weave an intricate lacework. The more he repeated common themes, turns of phrase, and theological interpretations at the frequent festivals of the female martyrs, the more his audience would have anticipated and acknowledged them. And so, while now we have more time to analyse his depictions of female martyrs and elucidate the subtle nuances, what we consider to be subtle and nuanced may have been perceived by his original audiences as obvious and expected.

As the title of this thesis suggests, the present study is not intended to be the last word on the subject of Augustine's female martyrs. Our main aim has been to promote a better understanding and appreciation of the significance of Augustine's female martyrs, and so to contribute to our knowledge of his theology and ministry. But, in the process, we have come across many interesting trajectories and avenues for further exploration that remain beyond our scope. Here we might like to consider how this modest contribution might be applied to inform and, perhaps, re-open discussion in different areas of research.

First, this study provides a different approach and an additional perspective to current debates on Augustine's attitudes towards women. As we have seen, his depictions of female martyrs are meaningful only in so far as they are ambivalent. While his repeated allusions to womanly weakness might seem to be demeaning, his positive presentation and constructive employment of the female martyrs relied on those gender stereotypes. Once we acknowledge the ambivalence that is inherent in the depictions, we begin to appreciate the moral and theological depth and value of Augustine's female martyrs. The implication of this is that we should not become too preoccupied with the discussion of whether his attitudes towards women were positive or negative, or whether they are evidence of misogyny or proto-feminism. The female martyrs remind us that Augustine was a man of his time. But they also reveal that he did not assimilate and assume ideas and beliefs unquestioningly. His depictions of female martyrs are at once conventional and innovative, conservative and novel. It is hoped that this thesis will introduce new sources to the debate, and provoke more (perhaps even alternative) readings of Augustine's female martyrs.

Second, our exploration of Augustine's depictions of female martyrs would naturally complement a broader comparative analysis of depictions of female martyrs in the fourth and fifth centuries. As we have seen, the female martyrs played an important role in Augustine's life. But Augustine is just one of many men who contemplated and represented them. Throughout this thesis we have had the opportunity to mention (albeit very briefly) some depictions of female martyrs that were produced by his contemporaries: Prudentius's lyrical poems on Agnes and Eulalia; Chrysostom's homilies on Drosis, Pelagia, and the Maccabean Mother; Asterius's *ekphrasis* on Euphemia. A wider study of these, and other depictions, would give us a better understanding of the significance of female martyrs for the formation and expansion of the Church in the fourth and fifth centuries. Such a study would allow us to pay closer attention to regional variations, local customs, historical and geographical influences, and the intentions and idiosyncrasies of the authors. But it would also enable us to identify the general trends and common themes shared between depictions that were formed in distant and disparate parts of the Roman Empire. We could also consider how the mediums employed by the authors affected the messages that they wanted to communicate; for example, we might explore the variation in depth, complexity, and emotional intensity when female martyrs are presented in written works, homilies, poems, or *ekphrases*. We might also consider visual representations alongside the textual sources, although, of course, artistic representations of female martyrs from the fourth and fifth centuries are scarce. A comparative study of diverse depictions would help us to see how the female martyrs were used to reaffirm shared cultural and religious beliefs, to instruct and educate congregations, to appeal to the tastes of popular piety, and to embody the spirit of the age.

Finally, our investigation of Augustine's depictions of female martyrs also has the potential to inform our understanding of patristic representations of women in general. At several points in this study we have observed that Augustine's female martyrs are both constructed and constructive. They are not accurate portraits of historical women, but they are creative images that were formed with the freedom of artistic license. Yet, the depictions were created with the specific intention of effecting change in the real, concrete world. While the relationship between representation and reality has not gone unnoticed in the study of women in early

Christianity, it is hoped that this thesis will add to the picture, not only by drawing attention to the *distinction* between representation and reality (that representations do not always reflect reality), but also by emphasising the *continued relationship* between representation and reality (that representations have the power to transform reality). Augustine's female martyrs teach us that, despite their artificiality, representations of women were some of the most important building blocks for early Christian communities.

As we reflect back on this study, we find that, although we have tried to focus on Augustine's female martyrs, our attention has been pulled in a number of directions: to creation, the Fall, the Incarnation, the centrality of grace, the fear of death, the hope for eternal life, and the importance of love. This is precisely what Augustine intended. He deliberately painted portraits that would resist our attempts to focus on them. As he portrayed the female martyrs, he erased the outlines and smoothed the contours so that the images would blur and blend into the background. And so, when we find a female martyr, our eyes do not know where to focus. There are no boundaries to contain her. The memory of her martyrdom spreads and seeps to colour the past, the present, and the future. We watch as her presence extends far beyond its point of origin; no event is too mundane, no scriptural verse is too obscure, to be coloured by her memory. But the image is not haphazard. As Augustine blurred the portrait of the female martyr, he sharpened and defined the directional lines that draw our minds to eternal truths.

Appendix

THE MAIN SOURCES FOR AUGUSTINE'S FEMALE MARTYRS

1. Individual / Named Martyrs.

SOURCE	LATIN	ENGLISH	EXCERPT	DETAILS
AGNES				
s. 53.1.	PL 38: 0364.	WSA III/3: 66.	Today is the feast of a holy virgin who publicly testified about Christ and who earned a testimonial from Christ, who was publicly slain and secretly crowned.	21 st Jan. 413, Carthage
s. 273.6.	PL 38: 1250-51.	WSA III/8: 19-20.	Blessed too is Saint Agnes, who also suffered on this same day; a virgin who was that which she was called.	21st Jan. 396
s. 286.2.	PL 38: 1298.	WSA III/8: 102.	[Peter] was not yet what a number of women have been, what Agnes, what Crispina have been.	19 th June, after 425
s. 354.5.	PL 39: 1565.	WSA III/10: 158.	In the time of persecution it was not only Agnes the virgin who was crowned, but also Crispina the married woman.	12 th May, before 410

BERNIKE, PROSDOKE, AND DOMNINA				
<i>civ. Dei</i> , 1.26.	PL 41: 0039-40.	Dyson: 38-39.	In the time of persecution certain holy women, in order to escape those who might abuse their purity, hurled themselves into a river which bore them away and drowned them, and in that way died. Moreover, their martyrdom is celebrated with veneration by great numbers in the Catholic Church.	413

CRISPINA				
<i>en. Ps.</i> 120.	PL 37: 1605-18.	WSA III/19: 510-26.	The persecutors turned their rage against Crispina, whose birthday we celebrate today. They unleashed their savagery against a rich woman, delicately nurtured; but she was strong.	5 th Dec. 406/07

Appendix: The Main Sources for Augustine's Female Martyrs

SOURCE	LATIN	ENGLISH	EXCERPT	DETAILS
CRISPINA (cont.)				
<i>en. Ps.</i> 137.	PL 37: 1774-84.	WSA III/20: 242-55.	Think how Saint Crispina rejoiced, the martyr whose festival we keep today; she rejoiced when arrested, rejoiced when haled before the judge, rejoiced when thrown into prison... In all these trials she rejoiced.	5 th Dec.
<i>s.</i> 286.2.	PL 38: 1298.	WSA III/8: 102.	[Peter] was not yet what a number of women have been, what Agnes, what Crispina have been.	19 th June, after 425
<i>s.</i> 313G.3.	MA I: 594-95.	WSA III/9: 124.	This Saint Eulalia, you see, from the province of Spain, a holy and valiant woman, who by her love overcame the weakness of her sex like Saint Crispina...	10 th Dec. 410-412
<i>s.</i> 354.5.	PL 39: 1565.	WSA III/10: 158.	In the time of persecution it was not only Agnes the virgin who was crowned, but also Crispina the married woman.	12 th May, before 410
<i>virg.</i> 44,45.	PL 40: 0422.	WSA I/9: 98.	How can she know whether perhaps she is not yet a Thecla, but the other woman already is a Crispina?	401

DONATA				
<i>s.</i> 37.23.	PL 38: 0221-35.	WSA III/2: 197.	It is a blessed daughter of this lady... whose martyrdom along with others we are celebrating today.	17 th July 397, Carthage

EULALIA				
<i>s.</i> 313G.3.	MA I: 594-95.	WSA III/9: 124.	This Saint Eulalia, you see, from the province of Spain, a holy and valiant woman, who by her love overcame the weakness of her sex like Saint Crispina...	10 th Dec. 410-12

SOURCE	LATIN	ENGLISH	EXCERPT	DETAILS
THE MACCABEAN MOTHER				
s. 100.2.	PL 38: 0603-04.	WSA III/4: 61.	Love your parents, but put God before you parents. Think of the mother of the Maccabees ...She commanded, and they followed.	c. 417
s. 286.6.	PL 38: 1300.	WSA III/8: 104.	Blush for shame in the presence of the mother of the Maccabees, who wanted her sons to die before herself, because she knew they were not dying.	19 th June, after 425
s. 300.	PL 38: 1376-80.	WSA III/8: 276-80.	Let women learn from the extraordinary patience, the inexpressible courage of that mother; she really did know how to keep and preserve her sons.	1 st August
s. 301.	PL 38: 1380-85.	WSA III/8: 282-88.	We heard with our ears, we saw with our imaginations this mother actually choosing that her sons should end this life before herself.	1 st August, c. 417
<i>an. et or.</i> 1.14,23, 25.	PL 44: 0487-88.	WSA I/23: 485-86	We also know that the mother of the young Maccabees, a woman richer in virtues when her sons suffered martyrdom than in offspring when they were born, encouraged her sons...	419/20
<i>c. Iul.</i> 5.15,53.	PL 44: 0814.	WSA 1/24: 466.	...hold the same position as the very wise woman, the mother of the Maccabees. For you quoted her words as well which she spoke to her sons, <i>I do not know how you came to be in my womb.</i>	421/22
<i>en. Ps.</i> 68(2).3.	PL 36: 0855-56.	WSA III/17: 385.	This mother was not like Eve; she was more like the Mother Church. She had borne her sons in pain in order to look upon them living, but now she joyfully watched them dying.	

SOURCE	LATIN	ENGLISH	EXCERPT	DETAILS
THE MACCABEAN MOTHER (cont.)				
<i>ep.</i> 243.6.	PL 33: 1057.	WSA II/4: 167.	[Your mother] is clearly not a mother of the sort that the Maccabees had, nor one like the mothers of Sparta, of whom it was said that they roused their sons for the conflicts of war much more persistently and much more passionately than the sounding of trumpets.	After 395
<i>mor.</i> 1.23,43	PL 32: 1329.	WSA I/19: 51-52	This woman, along with her seven children, allowed the tyrant and executioner to extract her vitals from her body rather than a profane word from her mouth...	387/88
<i>corrept.</i> 41.	PL 44: 0941.	WSA I/26: 137-38.	...the mother of the Maccabees says to her son, <i>That I may receive you in that mercy along with your brothers.</i>	426/27

MAXIMA, DONATILLA, AND SECUNDA				
<i>s.</i> 345.	PL 39: 1517-22.	WSA III/10: 58-66.	Women have followed him [Christ], those whose birthday we are celebrating today. We are celebrating the feast today of the women martyrs of Thuburbo.	411 or 416, Carthage
	PL 46: 0971-80.			

PERPETUA AND FELICITAS				
<i>s.</i> 159A. 11.	<i>Rev.Ben.</i> 102 (1992), 288-97.	WSA III/11: 142.	How did Perpetua become perpetually blessed...? What made Felicity fit for such infinite felicity, but her not being terrified by momentary infelicity?	15 th July 397, Carthage
<i>s.</i> 280.	PL 38: 1281-84.	WSA III/8: 72-77.	This day, coming round year after year, is a reminder to us, and after a certain fashion represents for us the day on which God's holy servants Perpetua and Felicitas, adorned with the garlands of martyrdom, burst into bloom in perpetual	7 th March

Appendix: The Main Sources for Augustine's Female Martyrs

			felicity.	
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SOURCE	LATIN	ENGLISH	EXCERPT	DETAILS
PERPETUA AND FELICITAS (cont.)				
<i>s.</i> 281.	PL 38: 1284-85.	WSA III/8: 78-79.	Both the merits and the names of Perpetua and Felicity, God's holy servants, shine out brightly and pre-eminently among their fellow martyrs.	7 th March
<i>s.</i> 282.	PL 38: 1285-86.	WSA III/8: 81-82.	Perpetua, of course, and Felicity are the names of two of them, but the reward of them all.	7 th March
<i>en. Ps.</i> 47.13.	PL 36: 0541.	WSA III/16: 347.	How many parents implored their children not to die! We know this well, and have read about it in the Passion of the blessed Perpetua.	
<i>an. et or.</i> 1.10,12, 2.10,14, 2.12.16, 3.9.12, 4.17.25, 4.18.26-27.	PL 44: 0481, 0503- 05, 0516- 17, 0538- 41.	WSA I/23: 479, 506-07, 522, 550-52.	The story of Dinocrates, the brother of Saint Perpetua, is not part of the canonical scriptures ...it is believed, as her martyrdom drew near, her prayers for him were heard so that he was transferred from punishment to rest...	419/20

THECLA				
<i>virg.</i> 44,45.	PL 40: 0422.	WSA I/9: 98.	How can she know whether perhaps she is not yet a Thecla, but the other woman already is a Crispina?	401

VALERIANA AND VICTORIA				
<i>s.</i> 325.1.	PL 38: 1448.	WSA III/9: 168.	Are you not the equal of Saint Valeriana? If you are still reluctant to follow, don't you want to accompany Victoria?	15 th Nov. 408

VICTORIA AND PERPETUA				
<i>s.</i> 335A.1.	MA I: 220- 22.	WSA III/9: 211-12.	Oh, what a victory without a fall, what an end without end! What, after all, is victory perpetual but victory without end?	Before 401

2. Anonymous / Groups of Female Martyrs.

SOURCE	LATIN	ENGLISH	EXCERPT	DETAILS
<i>Io. ev. tr.</i> 51.13.	PL 35: 1768-69.	FC 88: 279.	For many of your number have also given that greatest service, the service of suffering. Many who were neither bishops nor clerics, young men and women, older men as well as younger, many married men and women, many mothers and fathers.	414?
<i>Io. ev. tr.</i> 96.1(3).	PL 35: 1874.	FC 90: 194.	And yet later on both men and women, boys and girls, young men and young women, older men together with younger men, innumerable persons, were crowned with martyrdom.	419?
<i>s.</i> 64A.3.	MA I: 310-13.	WSA III/3: 190.	But how were women able to imitate this cunning of the snake, in order to win the prize medal, the crown of martyrdom?	
<i>s.</i> 68.13	MA I: 356-67.	WSA III/3: 232	Boys confessed him [Christ], girls confessed him; the stronger sex and the weaker.	425-30
<i>s.</i> 143.5	PL 38: 0787	WSA III/4: 428	It is not only men, but also women, and boys, and girls, martyrs all, that have defeated him [the devil].	410-12
<i>s.</i> 295.8.	PL 38: 1352.	WSA III/8: 201.	The Lord himself went along it first, the apostles went along it fearlessly; after them the martyrs, boys, women, girls.	29 th June 405-11
<i>s.</i> 299D.7.	MA I: 75-80.	WSA III/8: 261.	We heard about men behaving bravely, confessing manfully; we heard about women being true to Christ, not like women, but forgetful of their sex.	17 th July, before 413, Carthage

Appendix: The Main Sources for Augustine's Female Martyrs

SOURCE	LATIN	ENGLISH	EXCERPT	DETAILS
<i>s.</i> 299E.1.	MA I: 550-57.	WSA III/8: 263.	The strength, the fortitude, of Christ's martyrs, men and women alike, is Christ... The reason why the weaker sex too has been able to suffer bravely, is that God was able to make it possible in people of all sorts.	17 th July 397? Carthage
<i>s.</i> 305A.2.	MA 1: 56-57.	WSA III/8: 325.	Men have been crowned, women crowned. And among the women every age has been crowned. Nor did the female sex say, "I am unequal, because of my sex, to subduing the devil".	10 th August 401, Carthage
<i>s.</i> 306.10.	PL 38: 1400-05	WSA III/9: 23-24.	Why are you afraid of the hard ways of suffering and tribulation?... Blush for shame: many women travelled them too ...even boys passed along it, even girls passed along it.	18 th August 397, Carthage
<i>s.</i> 351.11.	PL 39: 1548.	WSA III/10: 132.	There you will see not only men, but also women, finally boys and girls, who were neither taken in through readiness, nor perverted through wickedness, nor broken through the fear of danger, nor corrupted through love of the world.	391
<i>mor.</i> 1.35,77.	PL 32: 1343.	WSA I/19: 66-67.	...how many military men, how many leading men in their own cities, how many senators, people of both sexes, giving up all these empty and transitory things... endured death for the salutary faith and religion...?	387/88

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